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November 23, 1997

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Editorial

The Objectivity Syndrome

In October, a reorganization of the senior management of the *Los Angeles Times* brought the paper's news department under the direct control of the business side, which will now ride herd on the editor to see that news pays its way—either by attracting advertisers or new readers.

Naturally, and thankfully, this blatant new restriction on the limited independence of big city newsrooms drew severe criticism from working journalists.

This included a long op-ed in the *New York Times* by Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism at

Columbia University. Like most of his colleagues, Rosenstiel lauded how early in this century Joseph Pulitzer stripped his newspapers of their traditional "ideological taint" in order to attract more readers and advertisers. Rosenstiel credited this process with leading to a new spirit of independence in newsrooms and to a "more professional, more ethical and bolder press."

The change, however, did not remove ideological content from news coverage. It merely obscured it while destroying a lively array of partisan publications that openly reflected the views of their editors, publishers and reporters. Thus, in the early 1900s, we had daily newspapers like the *Springfield* (Illinois) *Republican*, the *Rochester* (New York) *Democrat* and the *Milwaukee Socialist*. People bought such papers either because they shared the world view or out of a desire to consider a variety of perspectives. This diversity of partisan views sustained a high level of informed public debate and involvement in the major social issues of the day. Today, by contrast, news stories are saturated with real but unacknowledged ideological content that steadily saps our increasingly impoverished democratic culture.

Hidden behind this "objectivity," which is characteristic of the era we live in, a single ideological perspective prevails. Everything in our society is now measured in free market terms, or so it appears in the commercial

media. So, while it's true that most major newspapers have enjoyed walls of a sort between the day-to-day activities of their business and news departments, it's also true that news departments function as the ideological arm of their chief sponsors—the corporations whose advertising pays for what would otherwise be a losing business.

Furthermore, as even Rosenstiel pointed out, the surface independence and objectivity of professional journalists is a business necessity. Without it, it would be even harder to sell newspapers—especially now when the public is aware that a continually shrinking

number of giant conglomerates exercise a near-monopoly control over the press.

And what about this "objectivity"? Any honest and experienced journalist knows it's a sham. At the Media & Democracy Congress in New York in October, William Serrin, chairman of the Department of Journalism at New York University, offered an

example from his own experience as a labor reporter for the *Times*. One day, he said, his editor called him into his office.

"You're pro-worker," the editor said.

Taken aback, Serrin mumbled, "I'm sorry?"

"You're pro-worker," the editor repeated. "Cut it out."

Unbelieving, Serrin replied, "Did you ask Leonard Silk [the *Times*' economics writer at the time] if he's pro-banks? Or the Pentagon guy if he's pro-Pentagon?"

"Cut out the bullshit ... cut it out," the editor retorted sharply.

Well, there's nothing new here. Indeed, participants at the Media & Democracy Congress endlessly bemoaned corporate domination. Unfortunately, almost no one talked about the need to create, cherish and support independent media and about the need for a press that is beholden only to its readers. Such a media can only be sustained by those who have the means and who are dedicated to making our democracy more than a formal facade for corporate power. ■

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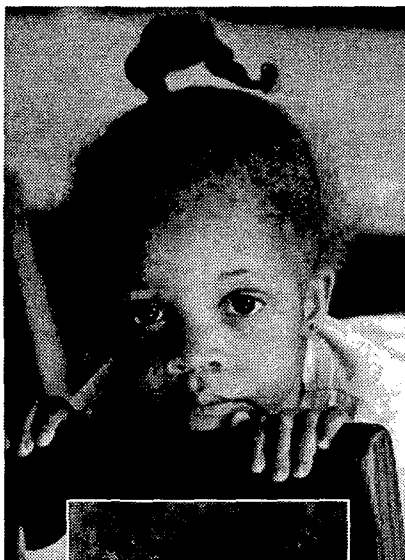
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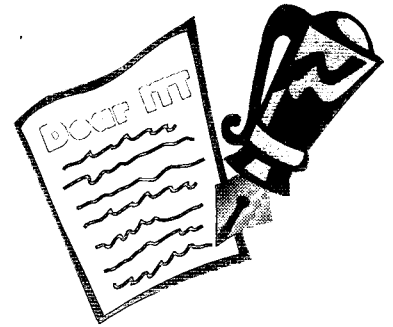
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Cover design by Estelle Carol



Got a Job

The article "Class Dismissed: Welfare Recipients Fight to Stay in College" (October 5) should have read "recipients fight to stay in college without working for the privilege." I am a single mother of eight children without any support from my ex-husband or welfare. I went back to college and completed my B.S. and M.S. by working and taking out Pell grants and loans. A daughter and son completed college by joining the Army Reserve and the National Guard, respectively. My children have worked as custodians, lifeguards, motel maids, telemarketers and whatever else they could get. Anyone who wants to go to college badly enough can do so. They don't have to depend on welfare for their tuition and their childcare. There are other options. Sure, it might take a little longer, but you can do it yourself.

Sheila E. Hewett
Provo, Utah

that leave piles of dead bodies.

They are half-right when they say that "the adverse effects of a crash are so small that it would be a formidable challenge to measure them." As with the radioactive iodine from the Nevada bomb tests, it would take decades for plutonium fallout from Cassini to make its way through the food chain and cause detectable tumors. By this time, the average American would have moved several times, making it impossible to estimate individual dosages and correlate them with a small percentage increase in the national cancer death rate. These deaths don't make good television, even if they run into the tens of thousands.

It's harder to ignore the ridiculously low "peer-reviewed" estimates of the probability of a shuttle explosion before the Challenger disaster. But then, I don't work for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

I'm more surprised with *In These Times*. This kind of obviously biased corporate viewpoint is normally published only in response to a previous article, and the authors' affiliation is identified at the top of the article. Instead, your readers had to wait until the end of the article to discover that the authors' incomes depend on Cassini.

Mike Farin
Madison, Wis.

In their defense of the plutonium-powered Cassini space probe, Nelson and Dawson write that the risks posed by Cassini should be compared "with the risk of other socially sanctioned activities, such as generating electricity from fossil fuels."

Nonsense. The risk of launching Cassini should be compared to the risk of not launching Cassini. Dangers associated with fossil fuel, air travel or getting struck in the nose by an asteroid are irrelevant.

Arnle Alpert
Canterbury, N.H.

Nelson and Dawson's comments on the Green Revolution in their article about Cassini are troubling. The increased yields wrought by the Green Revolution are dependent on the intensive use of petrochemicals and herbicides, which poisons the earth. The Green Revolution has caused indigenous peoples to stop raising traditional crops for local consumption, and raise crops for export instead. This encourages mechanized farming, increased infestation by pests and loss of traditional seeds.

There are many more hungry people

Cassininovas

Like me, Robert M. Nelson and Sandra M. Dawson ("Countdown to Cassini," November 2) probably grew up transfixed by the dramatic achievements of the U.S. space program, broadcast on live television. It's not surprising that they are scared by cataclysmic events like mushroom clouds and large meteor impacts



Detters

today than ever. This shows that more technology is often not a good solution.

Elenor Manire-Gatti
Amherst, Mass.

Your Cassini story doesn't deal with the main reason many of us are against the Cassini project. We believe that the military wishes to put nukes in space for many reasons. But if they were to try, they would meet massive public resistance and fail. So something innocuous like Cassini does the trick. Cassini is the military's Trojan Horse. The public and *In These Times* have been fooled.

Jack Speer
Chicago

Robert M. Nelson and Sandra M.

Dawson reply: Mike Farin argues that we can't have confidence in NASA's failure estimates because NASA understated the failure rate of the space shuttle prior to the Challenger loss. He may be partially correct. The Challenger investigation, however, revealed that the shuttle manager directed that the launch should proceed despite the fact that critical shuttle components (the o-rings on the solid rocket boosters) were being operated in an untested temperature range. NASA engineers knew this and properly reported it. But management overruled them. Unfortunately, good technology can always be offset by bad management.

Arnie Alpert suggests that the risks of launching Cassini should be compared to the risks of not launching it. Perhaps so. This is why our article outlined some of the important benefits that civilization will derive from Cassini.

Elenor Manire-Gatti is correct that the Green Revolution has also caused environmental degradation by creating an agricultural economy based on fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides. However, we question her assertion that "there are many more hungry people today than ever." The Green Revolution's unintended adverse environmental consequences can be addressed by relying more on natural fertilizers, integrating pest-management strategies and, most importantly, placing agriculture under greater social control. The issue is not technology but who con-

trols the technology.

Jack Speer's assertion that Cassini is a cover for military efforts to put nuclear weapons in space is absurd. The military's nuclear space program does not need NASA for a cover. Congress funds it at budget levels far higher than NASA's, and military classification provides far better cover than NASA ever could.

Last month, the U.S. Air Force successfully directed a high energy laser at the MSTI-3 earth-orbiting spacecraft in an attempt to disable it. Arms control advocates worry that such technology could be used to start a war in space by disabling the surveillance spacecraft that verify arms control agreements. The event was largely ignored by a left press fixated on Cassini. We plead with In These Times readers to get the priorities straight.

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Please keep them short and include your address and daytime phone number.

In These Times editor James Weinstein was honored in New York at the recent Media & Democracy Congress with a Lifetime Achievement Award. Weinstein established *ITT* 21 years ago as a publication that would serve as a catalyst for the emergence of a new left. Two other progressive institutions also owe their existence to Weinstein, *Socialist Review* and the Modern Times Bookstore in San Francisco. He is also the author of *Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1924* (1967), *Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918* (1968), *For a New America* (1970) and *Ambiguous Legacy: The Left in American Politics* (1975). Weinstein, who stepped down as publisher of *ITT* this summer, is currently working on a fifth book. Tentatively titled *Whatever Happened to Socialism?*, it will explore the history of socialism in the 20th century and contemplate its relevance as we move toward the 21st. ■

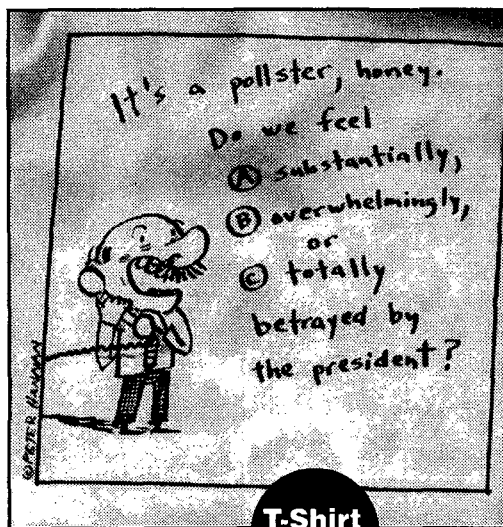
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IN THESE TIMES
NEWS WITH
NOTHING
LEFT out.

Scab Cargo Chased Out to Sea

BY DAVID BACON

After sitting like a beached whale for days at the Yusen Terminal in the Port of Oakland, the *Neptune Jade* finally sailed out of San Francisco Bay early in the morning of October 1. Every one of the dozens of huge shipping containers remained onboard, as the enormous freighter began a futile trek up the Pacific Coast, searching for a port where longshore workers would be willing to unload its cargo.

The *Neptune Jade* was carrying cargo from a British port operated by the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company. Two years ago, that company fired 500 longshore workers in Liverpool after they walked out on strike against deteriorating working conditions.

For four days, crews of San Francisco longshore workers, members of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) locals 10 and 34, were called to unload the ship. Each crew was met at the pier by a picket line organized by the Committee for Victory for the Liverpool Dockers.

The crews refused to cross the line, and at each shift change an arbitrator was called to the terminal to determine whether they had to go to work. On six occasions, the arbitrator ruled that the picket line constituted a health and safety hazard, and sent them home. Twice he ruled the crews had to work. But even then, the waterfront workers refused. ILWU Business Agent Henry Graham told the arbitrator that he was not about to order union members to become scabs.

The action at Yusen Terminal was just the latest in a string of support actions organized by West Coast dockworkers since the Liverpool strike began two years ago. On January 20 and September 8, the ILWU shut down all Pacific Coast ports for eight hours as part of a worldwide support action. "Five hundred guys lost their jobs in Liverpool,"

longshoreman Pete Bissell says. "It's worth all the help we can give them."

Liverpool was once the strongest union port in Britain, a country where all dockworkers were unionized for more than a hundred years. Under the Thatcher administration, however, British ports were turned over to private companies. These companies refused to recognize the unions, destroying almost all of them.

On September 29, 1995, a work speed-up and tumbling wages drove the workers to strike the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company, which had taken

bers wouldn't load scrap iron destined for Japan's war against China in the '30s or war materiel bound for Pinochet's Chile and El Salvador during that country's civil war. In 1984, they refused to unload a ship carrying cargo from South Africa for 11 days.

The ship owners won an injunction to stop the picketing of the *Neptune Jade*, and frustrated management representatives threw copies of the order at picketers. The Oakland police, however, simply stood on the sidelines with their arms folded, unwilling to enforce it.

The employers have sued the activists



Pickers in San Francisco march in support of fired British longshore workers.

control of the port earlier that year. The company promptly fired and replaced all 500 striking workers. Their case has since become a *cause célèbre* among longshore workers fighting privatization around the world.

In the last decade, ports in Mexico, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere have been privatized. In most cases, the process has led to mass layoffs, the destruction of unions and plummeting wages.

San Francisco longshore workers have a long tradition of stopping work in support of foreign workers. ILWU mem-

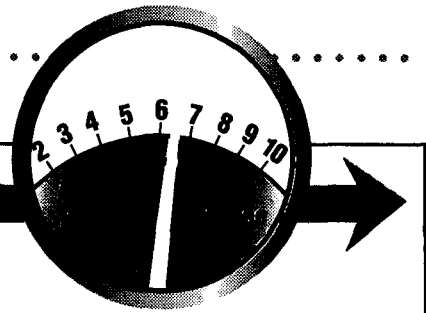
bers wouldn't load scrap iron destined for Japan's war against China in the '30s or war materiel bound for Pinochet's Chile and El Salvador during that country's civil war. In 1984, they refused to unload a ship carrying cargo from South Africa for 11 days. The ship owners won an injunction to stop the picketing of the *Neptune Jade*, and frustrated management representatives threw copies of the order at picketers. The Oakland police, however, simply stood on the sidelines with their arms folded, unwilling to enforce it. The employers have sued the activists

for damages. A company loses tens of thousands of dollars each day a ship is tied up in port without being unloaded. "I think they're angry because our action was very effective," picket captain Robert Irminger says. "Things won't end here." After dockers in Vancouver, British Columbia, refused to unload the ship, it sailed for Japan, where ports are under intense international pressure to privatize. The executive committee of the Japanese dockworkers union voted October 8 to refuse to unload the *Neptune Jade* there as well. ■

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appall-o-meter

BY DAVID FUTRELLE



The In These Times Index of Indecencies



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Happy Feet 5.9

There's gold in them there smelly shoes! A company called Small Earth Inc. is traveling the country buying up used Air Jordans and other "vintage" Nikes for up to \$1,500 a pair. They sell them to collectors in Japan, some of whom are willing to pay twice that for the really rare models. Japanese consumers "express personal identity through ... footwear," Chuck Vander Hoek tells UPI. Especially smelly footwear. Vander Hoek cautions potential shoe sellers not to try to spiff up the shoes before bringing them to him. "You might totally ruin a very valuable shoe," he warns.

Be Like Mike (Ovitz) 7.7

A recent investigation by the *Kansas*

City Star reveals that quite a few top officials in college sports are actually making out like pros. "The NCAA ... is a nonprofit organization that does not pay taxes on the rich television contracts that feed it," writes the *Star's* Mike McGraw. "Yet the NCAA's spending—from memberships at golf clubs, to more than 50 cars provided to employees, to first-class flights for committee members—contrasts starkly with the amateur lifestyles it seeks to impose on student players." Among the findings: The (tax-exempt) NCAA paid its director, Cedric Dempsey, nearly half a million dollars last year. Dempsey's predecessor, Dick Schultz, who lost his job after getting caught up in a college athletics scandal at the University of Virginia, was given a "golden parachute" worth at least \$700,000. Schultz was also fond of flying in the NCAA LearJet. On more than half of the 154 flights he took for "educational" purposes in 1989, he brought his wife along for the ride.

Spyin' in the Boys' Room 6.6

Sure, a lot of bosses like to keep close watch on their workers. According to one recent survey, perhaps a third of all employers do a little electronic snooping on the job—poking through employee e-mail, listening in on calls or

watching with video surveillance monitors. But few bosses get quite *this* close. Workers at a Consolidated Freightways truck terminal in Mira Loma, Calif., recently discovered that their bosses were peeping in on them while they were using the bathroom. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, a worker adjusting a mirror in one of the terminal's bathrooms found a camera hidden there; a police search shortly afterwards revealed a camera in another bathroom. Company officials said the cameras were put there to combat drug trafficking, though they couldn't recall ever alerting police about the alleged problem. The company denies any voyeuristic intent. The cameras were "nowhere near the urinal area or the [toilet] stall area," a spokesman explains. ■

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politics

No Money Back Guarantee

BY PAT ARNOW

When a North Carolina contractor didn't get the appointment he wanted from the governor, he simply asked for his campaign contribution back.

Highway contractor J.A. Cartrette made it clear in correspondence to public officials that he thought the \$30,000 campaign contribution to Democratic Gov. Jim Hunt's 1996 re-election campaign assured him an appointment to the Department of Transportation board, which controls the state's \$2 billion-a-year roads budget. He wrote that the secretary of transportation had

promised him "a seat at the table."

Cartrette complained in letters in July and August that he didn't get the appointment and was particularly offended because he "saw in the Wilmington paper ... that one DOT member only gave \$19,000." Then he asked for his campaign contribution to be returned.

"This is one of those golden moments in which somebody who doesn't know how the game is played blurts it out," says Pete MacDowell, director of Democracy South, a campaign-finance reform organization that uncovered the letters.

The connection between campaign contributions and favors is not usually well-documented. Even though Cartrette didn't get what he wanted, it's clear that big contributions go hand-in-hand with big appointments in North Carolina. The average campaign contribution to Hunt from DOT board members was \$11,000, Democracy South reports.

Because Cartrette described the system so explicitly in his letters, the district attorney in Columbus County is investigating him for bribery. He still hasn't gotten his money back. ■

Did Somebody Say ... McLibel?

Back in 1990, no one would have believed that two members of a small London anarchist group would become McDonald's greatest nemesis since the Hamburglar.

That year, the fast-food chain sued five members of London Greenpeace (no relation to Greenpeace International) for libeling the corporation in a pamphlet that criticized McDonald's for selling unhealthy food, damaging the environment, exploiting workers, hurting animals and manipulating children. While three members of the group apologized, part-time bartender Helen Steel, 31, and former postman David Morris, 43, took on the corporation in court. The trial began in 1994. Denied legal aid or a jury trial, the so-called "McLibel Two" defended themselves against McDonald's high-priced attorneys.

By the time the verdict was delivered in June, the trial had become the longest in British history. McDonald's spent more than \$15 million on the prosecution, and were awarded approximately \$98,000 in damages. Meanwhile, millions of versions of the original pamphlet have been distributed in rallies across the world and via the Web (www.mcspotlight.org) since the trial began.

During an October tour of the United States to promote global action against McDonald's as well as a book and documentary about their ordeal, Morris and Steel spoke with the editors of *In These Times*.

ITT: Why did you choose to target McDonald's in the first place?

David Morris: They're only a symbol of what all corporations are basically doing. Instead of abstractly criticizing the whole social system, it was an excellent way of getting very basic ideas across about healthy eating versus the promotion of junk food, workers' rights in contrast with the exploitation of labor that McDonald's represents, and so on.

ITT: Were you aware then of McDonald's record of suppressing its critics?

Helen Steel: No. When we got the writs, it was like a bolt from the blue. We had no idea that the libel laws in the U.K. were so draconian and that there was no protection of freedom of speech.

ITT: Three others who were served with writs capitulated to McDonald's and retracted their statements. Why didn't you apologize?

Steel: What were the options? What was there to apologize for? These are perfectly reasonable criticisms. We've got every right to make them and question the way multinationals are running society. McDonald's should be apologizing to the public for the damage they cause to the environment and to society. It was a gut feeling really. I don't like bullies, and I'm not going to be pushed into saying something that I don't really believe.

ITT: Was the struggle worth it?

Morris: Yes. Basically, we turned the tables and put them on trial. For the first time in history, a public tribunal looked in-depth into the business practices of a multinational corporation and compared the reality to the propaganda image, which they spend so much money manufacturing.

ITT: Are you going to actually pay the damages?

Steel: No, we're not paying. They don't deserve any money, and we haven't got any money. It just shows what the courts are really about. The court found McDonald's guilty of exploiting children, paying low wages, advertising their food deceptively and being responsible for cruelty to animals—yet no penalty is being imposed on them.

ITT: They haven't threatened anyone else since?

Morris: No. It's clear that McDonald's is devastated by the trial. All of the industry experts, corporate experts and legal and PR people are saying that this is a lesson for all corporations. If anyone does get sued anywhere else, they're going to say, "Oh my God, it's another

McLibel!" A good summary of the media attitude now would be that the case was the worst corporate PR disaster in history.

ITT: How do you keep up the momentum? How long do you plan to continue the campaign?

Steel: We didn't have a really special thing about McDonald's. We weren't involved in the campaign to start with. It was really only after the writs that we got heavily involved. The campaign isn't us. The campaign is the millions of people all over the world who are distributing leaflets and protesting outside the stores.

ITT: Are you celebrities in the U.K.?

Morris: We can't wait to climb down off this world stage that McDonald's has put us on. We're both anarchists, and we don't really want to be leaders or certainly not heroes. We've got other things that we want to do. We're both community activists by nature and were committed to such bread-and-butter issues as housing, unemployment and immediate environmental problems, such as traffic in our neighborhood.

ITT: What's the one thing people should remember about this campaign?

Morris: We weren't seeking any reforms from McDonald's. We were seeking the abolition of McDonald's and all corporations, but we weren't doing it in an abstract way—hey, let's abolish all corporations. We weren't even calling for a boycott of McDonald's. We were encouraging the public to think about these important issues. ■



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Whitman's Star Dims in New Jersey Race

BY JEFFERSON DECKER

The most surprising thing about the current race for governor of New Jersey is that it has turned into a real contest. Just last year, Republican incumbent Christine Todd Whitman was being touted as a possible vice presidential candidate. The economy is doing well, and crime is down in the state. Yet in late October, Whitman's lead over a little-known state senator, Democrat James E. McGreevey, was only four points. What happened?

Among other things, taxes. In 1993, Whitman unseated Democrat Jim Florio, promising to cut state income taxes by as much as 30 percent across the board. In 1994, she delivered on the tax cuts, while slashing state spending.

But three years later, the effects on New Jersey taxpayers seem to have been less than revolutionary. As state aid for government services, especially education, declined, many municipalities decided to raise property taxes to make up the difference. (Property taxes account for 46 percent of taxes collected in

New Jersey, while the national average is 31 percent.) "We have a lot of people who have not been satisfied with what [Whitman] delivered," says Julie Robinson, McGreevey's deputy campaign spokeswoman. "People really didn't save money."

Meanwhile, car insurance rates in the state remain the highest in the country. Tapping into public discontent, McGreevey has promised a 10 percent immediate rate cut as the centerpiece of his campaign.

McGreevey is not merely stealing the Republicans anti-tax playbook. On auto insurance, property taxes and education, he stresses egalitarian solutions: lowering insurance rates that operate as a regressive tax on drivers and shifting the tax burden from property taxes to a more progressive state income tax. He also proposes equalizing funding for all of New Jersey's school districts, where the gap between rich and poor districts is so large that the state Supreme Court has ordered Whitman to spend more state dollars on educational aid.

Whitman's campaign has stressed her record as a tax-cutter and welfare reformer. She has the advantage of incumbency during relatively good times and was able to raise enough money to qualify for matching funds weeks before McGreevey, allowing her to begin campaigning while he was busy raising cash.

By all accounts, she ought to be coasting into a second term. Nobody seems to have told McGreevey. ■

Get Back On Track

BY CRAIG AARON

With the number of riders continuing to fall, the nation's second-largest mass transit system is in crisis. After the most recent round of budget cuts at the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), "el" riders and bus drivers gathered across from City Hall, chanting, "The bus stops here!"

Dozens of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) members joined community activists at the rally on October 16. A few days earlier, the CTA had announced it was making \$25 million worth of service cuts in its 1998 budget and slashing another \$40 million by eliminating 800 jobs left vacant through early retirement. "Mass transit has lost its constituency," Mayor Richard M. Daley told the press. "Everybody's in love with their car."

In recent years, cities like Washington and Boston have managed to renew interest in public transportation. But in Chicago, where nearly 700 million riders used the CTA in 1978, only 425 million riders are projected for 1998.

Jerry W. Williams Jr., president of ATU Local 308, says the secret to saving the CTA isn't more service cuts, but rather an increase in funding and a renewed focus on customer service. "We need a long-term solution to the problem of transportation," Williams says. "If they continue to operate the way they're operating now, the patient is going to die."

Following the rally, the union sponsored a two-day "Transit Summit" to forge alliances with other community groups, labor organizations and politicians, to design a lobbying strategy and to generate proposals for new revenue sources. "There's an unfriendly majority right now," Elwood Flowers of the ATU says. "Until we can change their outlook toward mass transit, we need to find some innovative ideas." ■

Peter Hannan

Huge Mouth

What kinda movie you
up for, honey?

Good bad, bad good,
fun bad,
shallow good, or
headache-inducing,
award-winning
bad bad good?



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Press Pass

Girls, Girls, Girls

BY MILES HARVEY

Young women, shunned or patronized by everyone from social policy-makers to feminist intellectuals to entertainment execs, are finally insisting on the right to star in their own lives," writes Ann Powers in the November issue of the rock magazine *Spin*. In the publication's special "Girl Issue," Powers documents the rise of Generation X women as a political, economic, athletic and artistic force, which she calls Girl Culture. "Unlike conventional feminism, which focused on women's socially imposed weaknesses, Girl Culture assumes that women are free agents in the world, that they start out strong, and that the odds are in their favor. ... Mixing the bra-burning outrageousness of early women's liberation with the bullet bra-wearing, get-ahead attitudes of '80s rebel babes like Madonna, Girl Culture doesn't seek so much to infiltrate various establishments as to overrun them."

Does all this mean feminism is dead—or has it achieved its ultimate triumph? Neither one, writes *Ms.* magazine editor-in-chief Marcia Ann Gillespie in the publication's 25th anniversary September/October issue. Gillespie bemoans "folks who claim we are now in a postfeminist era—as if this is as good as it gets—or that the women's movement doesn't speak to women's realities." But *Ms.* celebrates a young Girl Culture of its own, with a special section celebrating 21 feminists under the age of 30, including singer Ani DiFranco, who also plays a prominent role in the *Spin* piece.

BUST, a New York-based 'zine that embodies the assertive new posture many young women are taking, has its own name for Girl Culture. "We were tempted to subtitle this issue of **BUST**, 'The Official Organ of Do-Me Feminism,' but decided against it since most

of our readers are probably better described as 'Fuck me' or 'Fuck you' feminists," write editors Celina and Betty in the recent "sex issue" of the 'zine (P.O. Box 319, Ansonia Station, New York, NY 10023 or www.bust.org).

But no matter what adjective they put in front of it, feminist is still the operative word. "It came as a great surprise to us that a sizable percentage of our readers answered 'No way' to the question, 'Do you consider yourself a feminist?' in last issue's **BUST**-tionnaire," they write. "To any of you out there who are still not sure, we offer this simple little quiz: Do you like **BUST**? If you answered 'yes' to the above question, congratulations! We hereby declare you a true-blue, in-your-face feminist fatale. May we call you 'Ms.?' "

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Perhaps the fact that he's not doing much while in office explains why everybody is wondering what Bill Clinton is going to do when he gets out. In an October 20 *New Yorker* story, Mimi Swartz reviews the future prospects—from college president to businessman to lecture-circuit guru—for the man

soon to be the second youngest ex-president in history (after Teddy Roosevelt). Leon Panetta, the president's former chief of staff, has another idea. "I'm willing to bet that within two years of retirement, he'll be running for office again," he says.

That's the same conclusion that John Nichols comes to in the October issue of *The Progressive*. In a cover story entitled "Senator Clinton?" Nichols wonders whether Clinton might follow the lead of John Quincy Adams, another lackluster president who went on to a great career in Congress, championing the cause of anti-slavery. Both stories overlook a post-presidency job possibility that's looking less and less posterous: inmate.

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In an otherwise politically dull fall season on PBS, at least one program promises to be of interest. It's *Skin Deep*, a documentary that looks at the future of race relations in America by talking with a variety of college students. It's scheduled to run on November 28; check local listings for the exact time. ■

online

- Steve Davies' Cyber Picket Line (www.cf.ac.uk/ccin/union) features the "World Directory of Trade Unions," which contains more than a thousand links to labor groups from Australia to Venezuela. He also provides an annotated list of union resources, worldwide action updates and a highly opinionated column on British labor affairs.
- The First Amendment Center keeps a close watch on threats to the freedoms of speech, press, religion and assembly. Their stellar site (www.fac.org) includes constant updates from the state and federal courts, detailed files on recent Supreme Court decisions and a historical timeline tracing the evolution of the Bill of Rights.
- In the past decade, nine death row inmates in Illinois have been released after investigations by journalists and volunteer lawyers proved they were innocent. The men are profiled at www.ninelives.org as part of a campaign to place a moratorium on capital punishment in Illinois, a state where death row prisoners are more likely to be exonerated than executed.

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Nobel Fo

BY DEIDRE MCFADYEN

The Swedish Academy was in a daring mood this year. It awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine to an American scientist whose work is hotly disputed. It handed the Nobel Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines in a blatant effort to influence the political process. And it awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature to Dario Fo, the 71-year-old Italian satirical playwright whose life project has been to turn the casual theater spectator into a fiery revolutionary.

In 1968, Fo renounced a promising career as a TV comic and commercial theater actor to ply his craft in factories and clubhouses before working-class audiences who normally wouldn't set foot inside a theater. Against all odds, he reached the mass public he was after. At the peak of his popularity in the early '70s, Fo's plays were pulling in crowds of 10,000 or more.

Fo creates outrageous, belly-slapping farces with a political point. He draws freely from both the comic traditions of wandering medieval jesters and *commedia dell'arte* and the political traditions of Bertold Brecht and Antonio Gramsci. Fo's political barbs are sharpest in *Mistero Buffo*, a savage satire of the miracles of Christ that the Vatican condemned as blasphemous, and *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, a play that skewers the cover-up of the 1969 murder of a left-wing bombing suspect while in police custody.

Fo's subversive brand of humor has raised the hackles of the establishment. The Italian government pulled the plug on his TV show in the early '60s and refused to broadcast his work on state TV again until 1977. The Reagan administration got into the act as well, twice denying visas to Fo and his wife and collaborator Franca Rame under a law that barred entry to people who belonged to the Communist Party or engaged in anti-government activity.

Media Powwow

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS AND DEIDRE MCFADYEN

More than a thousand journalists, broadcasters, filmmakers, scholars and activists gathered this October in New York for the Media & Democracy Congress, the much-anticipated encore to the 1996 San Francisco conference. The event, organized by the Institute for Alternative Journalism (IAJ), showed that progressives still have a ways to go in figuring out how to use and interact with both mainstream and independent media.

At *The Nation's* all-star evening panel, Mark Crispin Miller and Christopher Hitchens ambushed *Time* magazine managing editor Walter Isaacson. Miller unveiled two easels: one with a picture of the Time Warner film *Twister* and one with a *Time* cover entitled "On the Trail of Twisters," which had the exact same tornado image. An angry Isaacson accused Miller of attacking his journalistic integrity. The sniping between the two camps, each accusing the other of elitism, filled the rest of the evening.

The usual suspects—Jeff Cohen, Barbara Ehrenreich, Herb Chao Gunther, *et al*—were showcased at the conference's opening plenary. Some of the more interesting debates and fresher voices came from the smaller daytime sessions. There were plenty of panels on gay and lesbian issues thanks to the Strategic Progressive Information Network (SPIN), the IAJ's media-training project that is a current foundation favorite. Congress organizers also paid more attention to the labor movement and labor journalism. "I was gratified to see how many reporters in the alternative media were interested in meeting their counterparts in the labor media," says Janine Jackson of Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting. "That cross-pollination of ideas was very successful and should lead to more collaborative work."

The second congress also put a greater emphasis on politics. Some participants, for example, are working together on model anti-trust legislation that could break up media monopolies. "That alone makes the conference a success," says Robert McChesney, author of *Corporate Media and the Threat to Democracy*.

Other conference-goers expressed weariness at the inability of alternative media to reach a broader audience. Michael Moore scolded Congress participants for their holier-than-thou attitude toward ordinary Americans. He said progressives need "to be out there speaking the language of America to Americans." Moore pointed to a raucous Pacifica panel earlier that day as an example of the problem.

John Moyers, executive director of the Schumann Foundation, which helped fund the conference, says that Moore was on target. "It is not enough to have these seemingly endless internal debates," he says.

The conference's emphasis on media activism went hand in hand with navel-gazing discussions about cultural elitism. "Nineteenth century populists didn't worry if they were condescending to people for the simple reason that they were the people," says Chris Lehmann, an editor at *Newsday*. "So instead of fretting about the access to the media, they created their own media and devoted columns to monetary theory and political philosophy."

Unfortunately, few in New York were talking about using the left's own media institutions to develop and disseminate ideas. ■

(The State Department granted the couple waivers in 1984 and 1986.)

The announcement of Fo's prize competed with headlines the same day announcing the imminent fall of Italy's government. The Communist Refounding Party were threatening to pull out of

the center-left coalition in a dispute over a budget that slashed social spending in order to meet the stringent fiscal requirements for the European common currency. That telling coincidence underscored the continuing importance of Fo's pointed jabs at the powers-that-be. ■

One for the Books

BY JANE SLAUGHTER

In an effort to make Borders bookstores stop an anti-union campaign, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) kicked off a national campaign at the company's Ann Arbor, Mich., headquarters on October 1. More than 100 union supporters marched to pressure company management to sign a "fair campaign agreement" and refrain from hiring union busters during organizing drives. Within a week, the UFCW followed up with two more protests at Michigan bookstores.

"People say that we shouldn't expect to make a living wage because it's only retail," says Jacqueline Umberger, who works at a Borders in Des Moines, Iowa. Union supporters say that's the company's chief argument against unions. The average starting wage at Borders is \$6.25.

Four of Borders' 169 stores have voted to unionize in the past year. In October, Chicago's Lincoln Park store was the first to reach a contract, which only guarantees pay increases in Borders' existing wage progression but gives current employees a one-time \$150 bonus. It also contains a grievance procedure, a guaranteed 40-hour work week for those who want one and a union shop. Now, says the UFCW, the company should quit stalling at the other three stores in Des Moines, New York and Bryn Mawr, Pa., and give its 10,000 employees nationwide the opportunity to unionize.

To discourage organizing, the UFCW says, Borders management uses intimidating tactics such as "one-on-one" meetings with supervisors and employs a notorious union-busting law firm, Jackson, Lewis, Schnitzler and Krupman, which is known for its "take-no-prisoners approach to collective bargaining," according to the New York *Daily News*.

To no one's surprise, Borders managers refused to sign the fair campaign pledge. "We intend to proceed just as we

have been in working directly with the employees in instances where there are union campaigns," Vice President Marilyn Slankard says.

Borders has always praised its employees for their knowledge and love of books. "Borders brags about what an intelligent and useful and helpful work force they have," UFCW organizer Lisa Canada says. "Yet they pay them as low as they can get away with."

Borders management is upfront about that policy. In April, a company newsletter advised employees: "We have highly educated employees who consider themselves 'professionals,' but who are in reality working at an early level retail job. Ultimately each person must make a choice within the modalities of the possible. If you desire an enjoyable job while you figure out what to do with your life, this is a good place to be. But if you try to make a career path out of something which can never be a well-paying job, you will be up against an impossible task because of all of the economic constraints in the retail industry."

Of course, Borders paid CEO Robert DiRomualdo nearly \$24 million last year, the company is growing exponentially, and it's set to open its first overseas store on November 1 (in Singapore, a country where unions are banned).

The UFCW is fighting an uphill battle without strong organizing committees in many stores. The idea, Canada says, is to attract potential supporters through feisty public actions.

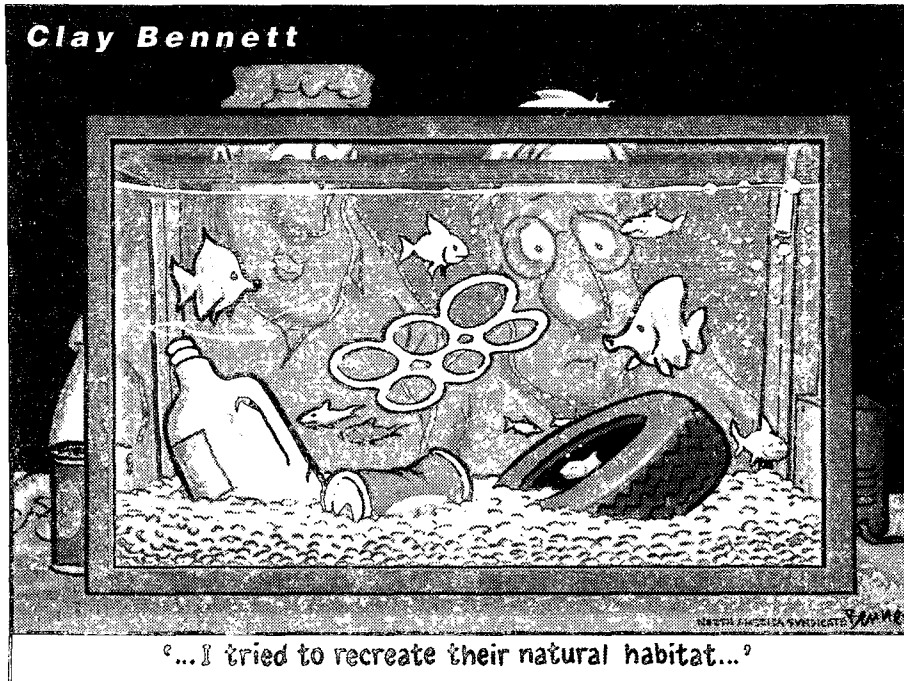
"We want to set a precedent in retail," she says. "Now, people see it as a stepping-stone position, not a real job. Well, auto jobs weren't considered good jobs back in the '30s, until people organized."

The campaign will run through the end of the year. The union is not calling for a boycott, but rather encouraging supportive customers to approach managers and ask them to sign the fair campaign agreement.

The UFCW may get a boost from Michael Moore's new movie, *The Big One*, when it is released this winter. The movie includes shots of workers at the Des Moines Borders talking with Moore in a parking lot about why they want a union. ■

Jane Slaughter writes for Labor Notes in Detroit.

Clay Bennett



Communication Breakdown

BY JUAN GONZALEZ

No one had ever heard of a country being shut down over the fate of its telephone company, but that's pretty much what happened to Puerto Rico on October 1. That day, more than one-third of the island's public school teachers, thousands of university professors, and workers in the ports, hospitals, bus companies and public utilities walked off their jobs in a 24-hour general strike.

Nearly 150,000 union members, students and religious leaders (one of every 12 adults in the country) then marched to the national legislature in San Juan in the biggest protest in Puerto Rican history. They were seeking to derail Gov. Pedro Rossello's planned sale of the government-owned Puerto Rico Telephone Co., a source of great public pride.

Virtually all the media in the United States neglected to report the unprecedented event. Not a word was heard on the evening network news or found in any major national publication. In New York, where Puerto Ricans are the city's largest ethnic group, the media gave the event cursory treatment. The New York *Daily News* (where I work) ran a short wire-service story on a back page, and a single photo of the protest, unaccompanied by any written account, was tucked deep into the *New York Times*.

Since Bill Clinton and the Republicans in Congress delivered the Telecommunications Act of 1996 to corporate America, some of the biggest and most closely-watched Wall Street deals have transpired between telecommunications conglomerates. This year, news outlets trampled each other in the rush to cover WorldCom's offer of \$30 billion in stock to buy MCI, Bell Atlantic's \$25 billion swallowing of NYNEX, and SBC's \$16 billion purchase of Pacific Telesis, to name a few. But when Puerto Rico erupted with the first massive public resistance to Wall Street's deregulation bandwagon, the mainstream media ignored it.

Don't think for a moment that Puerto Rico Telephone is small bananas. It is the 12th-largest telephone company in the United States, with operating revenues of \$1.2 billion in 1996. It controls 1.2 million fully digital telephone lines and 23,000 pay phones and has 169,000 cellular and 204,000 paging customers.

For nearly a quarter-century, the government-owned company has been the pride of Puerto Ricans, much as the oil

giant PEMEX is for Mexicans. Telephone service on the island is efficient, modern and cheap. Pay phones still charge only 10 cents a call. It wasn't always this way. For 60 years, the telephone franchise belonged to ITT. Back then, phones were notoriously unreliable and available only to the well-to-do in cities. ITT would regularly shift obsolete equipment from its subsidiaries in Chile and other Latin American countries and recycle it in Puerto Rico.

Former Gov. Rafael Hernández Colón, fed up with the terrible service, purchased the company from ITT in 1974. Today it is so profitable that it contributes more than \$100 million a year to the government budget and provides free service to all public schools and city governments. Its chief operating officer makes less than \$150,000 a year, a bargain compared to the astronomical salaries of mainland telecommunications executives.

But precisely because of its turnaround, the company has become a tempting target. The Telecommunications Act will soon eliminate local telephone monopolies, so major U.S. companies such as Bell Atlantic, SBC, AT&T and GTE are all eager to rush to the island.

Americans have scant knowledge of the enormous wealth that Puerto Rico and its 3.7 million people have provided U.S. corporations over the course of its 100 years as a U.S. colony. By 1986, U.S. companies made more profit in Puerto Rico (\$5.8 billion that year) than anywhere else, including Canada, Germany or the United Kingdom.

Gov. Rossello is eager to win congressional approval for a new plebiscite asking residents if Puerto Rico should remain a U.S. commonwealth, become a state or become an independent country. Rossello is a conservative who wants statehood. He knows the Republicans in Congress despise government ownership of any service that private business could profitably exploit. So Rossello and the legislature, which his New Progressive Party controls, passed a law this summer to sell the phone company by December.

The only group standing in Rossello's way is the organized labor movement. The governor labeled the October 1 strike illegal. Bosses threatened to dock every striker's pay. And still the people walked out. Not for more money. Not for better benefits. They walked out to save a telephone company that belongs to every Puerto Rican. They refused to surrender the nation's pride to Wall Street. No editor in the United States thought that was news. ■

**The U.S.
media chose
to ignore the
biggest
protest in
Puerto Rican
history.**

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

THE NEW Black Panthers

*Neo-panther groups lack the ideology
that animated the original*

In Dallas, a group called the New Black Panther Party has become a volatile element in a long-simmering dispute over the leadership of the Dallas School Board. Black and Latino parents have been frustrated by a white-controlled school board that sets policy for a district in which 90 percent of school kids are non-white. Last year, members of the Panther group—decked-out in black berets and combat fatigues—were arrested after disrupting a board meeting. The group forced the cancellation of the next scheduled meeting by vowing to attend in full regalia, armed to the teeth. Other groups calling themselves the Panthers have formed in St. Louis, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, New York and Chicago. But even as they adopt the persona and nomenclature of the Black Panther Party of the '60s, many of these neo-panthers lack the radical political ideology of the original group.

The Black Panther Party for Self Defense, an organization created 31 years ago this month by two black college students in Oakland, Calif., is enjoying a resurgence in popularity among black youth. That should not come as surprise. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale formed the group in 1966 during a time, like now, when African-Americans were reevaluating the tactics and gains of the civil rights movement. Malcolm X—a caustic critic of non-violent protest who Newton credited for inspiring the Black Panther Party—had been murdered the year before. The civil rights movement had bogged down in the South as protesters came under increased physical attack from resistant whites.

In addition to its primary purpose of self-defense, the Black Panther Party educated blacks about their historic oppression, and urged them to work within their communities, building institutions and delivering direct services to those most in need. Much of the Panthers' attraction,

however, can be attributed to its ghetto-honed militance, its pomp, its swagger and its guns. Members derisively referred to police as "pigs." The group explicitly rejected the "we shall overcome someday" motto of the era's civil rights protesters. The Panthers wanted to overcome yesterday. At its peak in 1969, about 5,000 people had signed up, while many thousands sympathized with the group's cause.

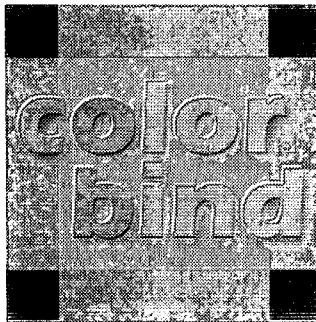
The Panthers had an intellectual agenda. Combining elements of Marxist dialectics, the aphorisms of Mao Zedong, Frantz Fanon's theories of anti-colonial violence and Malcolm X's black nationalism, Newton fashioned a patchwork ideology—a kind of left-wing Black

Power. The Panthers held that African-Americans' condition was analogous to that of colonial people in the Third World and that only an armed, socialist revolution against the powers of capitalism could free them.

In many of the Panther chapters that proliferated during the group's heyday from 1967 to 1970, members were given reading lists and encouraged—often required—to engage in discussions about political philosophy.

Following the example of Malcolm X, the Panthers cast themselves as intellectual warriors as well as political radicals. "We had serious and heated discussions about seemingly minor issues, like whether Che Guevara's efforts in Bolivia were consistent with Mao's essay on contradictions," recalls Edmond Coyle, a former member of the Panthers' New Jersey chapter. "And right after that, we'd take off to organize some free food give-away or children's breakfast program."

In 1968, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover called the Panthers "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country" and developed a counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) to "neutralize" the group. "Police departments in every city in America had political



squads set up specifically to deal with the Panthers,” says Kathleen Cleaver, former communications secretary for the group and wife of former Panther theorist Eldridge Cleaver.

Across the country, police destroyed Panther offices and locked up scores of members on trumped-up charges. Akua Njeri, survived one of the most infamous of those raids. On December 4, 1969, Chicago police—aided by an FBI informant—raided the apartment she shared with Fred Hampton, the legendary chairman of the Black Panther Party’s Illinois chapter. Hampton and Mark Clark, a Panther from Peoria, were killed. Njeri, known as Debra Johnson at the time, was nine-months pregnant with Hampton’s son. “I just remember hearing somebody trying to wake Fred saying, ‘Chairman, chairman, the pigs are vamping,’ and the sound, or rather the feel, of gunshots that literally vibrated the bed that we were sleeping in,” she recalls.

The FBI also fomented internal dissension. In the early ’70s, the group became divided between its East and West Coast chapters. The bloody feud ultimately fractured the Panthers beyond repair. By 1974, the Panthers had withered to a small group, based in the Bay area, where it had been born just eight years before.

Newton, who later became a cocaine addict, was shot and killed in a dispute with a drug dealer in 1989. Seale lives in Philadelphia and lectures frequently on the Panthers. Many original Panthers are in jail or exile, including Assata Shakur, who lives in Cuba. Others, like Rep. Bobby Rush (D-Ill.), have traded in their berets and leathers for the suits and ties of mainstream politics, but still contend they are engaged in the struggle to empower African-Americans.

Many of the neo-panther groups condemn Rush as a sell-out. They show an anti-establishment zeal reminiscent of their progenitors, but their ideology is considerably less rigorous. While Newton demanded his followers gain a global understanding of history and master the ideological intricacies of Marx and Mao, the neo-panthers focus on the kind of skin-color nationalism that the original Panthers disdained.

The New Black Panthers of Dallas, for example, are working with Khallid Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan’s former spokesman, who made public statements so racist that his boss was forced to silence him. “The New Black Panther Party would not draw so much on Marxist ideology, but the party would draw on African culture and tradition,” Muhammad

told *XXL* magazine.

In Chicago, the Black Panther Party for Community Enrichment has made its presence known at several demonstrations against police brutality. Edward Boone, its leader and founder, created the group following his return from the Million Man March in October 1995. “While at the march, I met some Panthers from St. Louis, and I was impressed with their apparent dedication to do something real,” he says. “With our communities in such bad shape, with drugs and gangs taking over, I began wondering why there weren’t Black Panther chapters all across America. So when I came back to Chicago, I decided to start a chapter here.”

Like the other neo-panther groups, Boone’s motivation is only partially ideological. His vision of the Panthers is closer to the vigilantism of the Guardian Angels than to the radical politics and black nationalism of the Panthers of old. Based near the city’s infamous Cabrini Green housing project, Boone’s group organizes block clubs and assists senior citizens with their shopping rounds. He talks of providing positive role models for youths vulnerable to gang influence and of “not becoming our own destroyers.”

In April, a coalition of varied Panther groups met in Los Angeles and

formed the New Panther Vanguard Movement, which includes the New Panthers of Dallas and the Black Panther Militia of Minneapolis and Milwaukee. “The major and immediate objective of the New Panther Vanguard Movement,” the group wrote in its newspaper, *The Black Panther International News Service*, “is to organize the support and participation of each of the recently emerged ‘panther groups,’ and to recruit any and all of those individual ‘panther activists’ (old and new) who continue to carry on in the revolutionary spirit and organizing tradition of the original Black Panther Party.”

Because of her intimate connection to one of the group’s most heroic martyrs, Njeri, now a 47-year-old grandmother, is one of the few Black Panther veterans universally respected among neo-panther wannabes. In the last few years, she says, she’s been besieged by young activists seeking sanction for some panther-like formation. But she is cautious about endorsing some of the new groups. “I understand the lure of the Black Panther name, and in one sense I’m flattered by their use of the label,” she says. “But I still insist that they maintain some connection to our legacy if they’re going to use



Co-founders Huey Newton (top row, second from left) and Bobby Seale (far right) gave the Black Panthers a ghetto-honed militance and a unique left-wing Black Power ideology.

the name Black Panthers." Other original Panthers are considerably less tolerant. A number of them held a news conference in Dallas, demanding that the New Black Panther Party in that city stop using the name.

Njeri believes that her own new group, the National People's Democratic Uhuru Movement (NPDUM)—a radical organization connected to the African People's Socialist Party—is the true heir to the original Panther spirit. "We are a movement to defend African national democratic rights—rights to have control over our own communities and to struggle for freedom and self-determination, which is the highest form of democracy," says Njeri. NPDUM, a six-year-old group which is headquartered in St. Petersburg, Fla., made national headlines last year when authorities blamed the group for inciting the violent protest that erupted following the police shooting of an 18-year-old black man during a traffic stop.

The rise and fall of the original Black Panther Party is revealing. The image of militance, audacity and discipline that the group projected gave black youth a sense of agency and relevance, and minimized the appeal of street gangs. The Panthers' focus on ideology underscored the importance of intellectual work, while their policy of "serving the people" ensured that their theory was grounded in community issues. The Panthers also revealed the power of effective propaganda, distributing their message through newspapers, leaflets, cartoons and buttons, and at mass rallies and even funerals.

But the Panthers' short, brilliant career also demonstrated the old truth that power corrupts. Members tolerated egotistical tyranny from Newton in the name of organizational discipline. Their revolutionary rhetoric outstripped their capabilities. The group often needlessly provoked police. And the Panthers were plagued by chronic short-term thinking, making few real attempts to build institutions to meet community needs; rather, members "requested" contributions from already existing institutions.

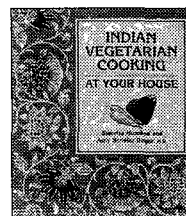
Indeed, at one level, the Panther Party was playing out a pure cops-and-robbers fantasy. Ironically, that was also one of its most attractive features. (Certainly, that was one reason why I became an active member from 1969 through 1971.) The Panther era was a period of transition, high promise and dashed expectations. It was a time for experimental militance, a kind of dress rehearsal for the revolution.

Those groups now emulating the Panthers understandably are reacting to the absence of radical black voices during another period of transition. Traditional black leadership (that is, the civil rights hierarchy) has lost the allegiance of many young blacks. Farrakhan is an attractive figure because he has been the lone, though deceptive, symbol of black insurgency and one of the few black leaders unattached to electoral politics or academia. Through their embrace of Nation of Islam-style nationalism, these new groups are seeking to supply what, they argue, the original group lacked: a genuine black agenda. But one of the major purposes of the original Black Panther Party was to reveal how easily the passions of "skin nationalism" can be corrupted and exploited. The neo-panthers, without that crucial understanding, are running away from the lessons of history. ■

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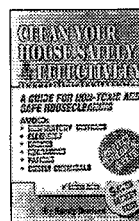


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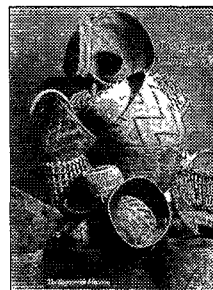
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BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

Sacred Cow Or, Bull?

Questioning the Tenets of Political Organizing

In the '40s and '50s, Saul Alinsky took a new kind of grass-roots politics to the white working-class residents of Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood. His goal was to empower people by making them realize that working together, they could influence government. Alinsky's organizing philosophy—as expressed in his books *Reveille for Radicals* (1946) and *Rules for Radicals* (1971)—became the conventional wisdom for organizers of all stripes. But in the 50 years since Alinsky's principles became gospel, the left has seen its political influence steadily erode. And that raises an intriguing question: Have Alinsky's theories of political organizing led progressives to a dead end?

In September, members of the National Organizers Alliance (NOA) gathered at their annual conference in Estes Park, Colo. The 380 organizers, representing a constellation of cultures and causes, attended workshops with titles like "The Knack of Organization Management" and "Theater Techniques for Activists." They listened to an intergenerational dialogue between Victor Reuther, who organized Detroit auto workers in the '30s, and his granddaughter Valerie Reuther, who organizes Seattle lesbians in the '90s. And they did something the left has long left undone. They examined the tenets of political organizing, and asked: "Are these really sacred cows or just a lot of bull?"

The conference used a series of role-playing exercises called the "Social Justice Dialogues," developed by the NOA and the Applied Research Center, in Oakland, Calif. Conference-goers split into small groups to examine in-depth one "Sacred Cow of Organizing." One person presented a scripted case for the principle's importance, and then the group debated whether the organizing tenet should remain sacred. Drawing on Alinsky's theories, the NOA chose *democracy*, *simplicity*, *quantity*, *winning*, *pragmatism*, *diversity* and *harmony* as the seven sacred cows of organizing.

The Sacred Cow of Democracy was one of the most hotly debated. This is the idea that organizers are facilitators, not leaders. According to this principle, organizers should help people to empower themselves, instead of dictating from the

top down. As the cow quipped in its scripted role, "Organizers don't take a side, always let the people decide." In support of organizational democracy, participants mentioned that groups that do not develop democratically often become alienated from their members. For example, the National Toxics Campaign Fund self-destructed in 1993 when members revolted against an autocratic leadership that punished dissent. But others at the conference replied that, by the nature of their work, organizers exert power and influence over a group's activities and that it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. With that power, they argued, comes the responsibility to challenge and develop the group's political consciousness.

The Sacred Cow of Simplicity is the idea that when organizing around an issue, you should have a straightforward message that people can understand and remember. Organizers should avoid political theory, complicated analysis and too many details. In the role-playing scenario, the cow is given a scripted motto: "Keep it simple, stupid." Conference-goers noted that it may be most efficient in the short run to blanket a community with a simple, understandable message. But simple messages usually do nothing to educate a community about these issues, which can't be turned into a slogan or 60-second rap as you go door-to-door.

Likewise, the Sacred Cow of Quantity puts a premium on efficiency, arguing that one must strive to win the support of a majority in order to be successful. The goal of this sacred cow is the development of a mass mobilization or mass movement. These days, with few wins in sight and a mass movement still around the bend, this tenet can be easy to dismiss. As one conference-goer put it, "By getting focused on numbers, you sometimes end up with lowest-common-denominator politics." Another aptly observed, "The right has moved a lot of things without necessarily having a majority."

The Sacred Cow of Winning, one of Alinsky's favorites, still commands a wide following. This tenet holds that it is only worthwhile to organize around issues that can be won, and won quickly. Winning, after all, makes people feel



empowered and can invigorate an organization. But what is won must be worth winning. Concentrating only on winning propositions encourages groups to hew to the middle of the road and not pursue systemic change. And focusing on winning can narrow strategic options. Sometimes it makes sense to organize around an issue or run a candidate even if you will lose. In Chicago, for example, the New Party has run candidates for city council knowing they will be beaten, but believing that the campaign in itself will lay the groundwork for future victories.

The Sacred Cow of Winning is a close cousin of the Sacred Cow of Pragmatism. Pragmatists tap into popular values and common sense and ignore underlying issues of ideology. The script for this cow reads, "A fraction of action beats paralysis of analysis." A pragmatic approach does have a few things going for it. As one participant said, "By being non-ideological, you start with where people are at." Another added, "You get people to learn by doing rather than getting them to engage in a whole bunch of analysis."

But the cow of pragmatism sometimes doubles as the movement's pale horse. A lot has been left undone or unsaid in the name of pragmatism. Sometimes, pragmatism becomes a reason to accept a second-rate solution, rather than fight for what is truly right. Consider the debate that has roiled the campaign finance community in the past two years. In the name of pragmatism, many reformers refused to embrace public financing of elections since such a solution, while admittedly ideal, was considered too radical. Only now that voters in Maine proved them wrong have many of the pragmatists come around. "Pragmatism is tactical, not strategic," noted one participant.

The Sacred Cow of Diversity maintains that racism is best addressed by groups and organizations with a diverse leadership and ranks. The cow's scripted jingle goes: "Diversity is the key to the new majority." While the benefits of diversity are self-evident, some NOA organizers—most of them members of minority groups—were critical. One noted that efforts to foster diversity "often ignore social class." Another commented that a group sometimes needs "to consolidate its own power before trying to assimilate into other types of formations." A third argued that "stressing diversity can foster identity politics."

Examining the issue of diversity was hard for some conference participants. "Whenever you deal with issues of diversity and identity politics, people are uncomfortable," said Djar Horn, who organizes parking attendants in Washington, D.C., for the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union. "You are treading a line. Nobody wants to offend someone on questions of race, ethnicity or hierarchies of oppression."

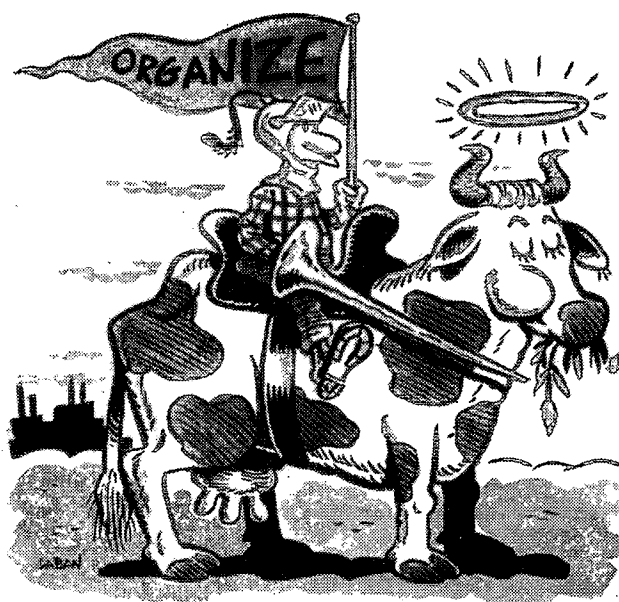
Closely related to diversity, the Sacred Cow of Harmony represents the widely held belief that identity politics only amplifies differences between people. "The argument goes, that if only we all developed a good cohesive economic analysis, we would realize progressive gains, and the reason that hasn't happened is because identity politics has intervened and atomized us," says Kim Fellner, executive director of the NOA.

But reconciling the demands of social and economic issues in a multicultural society is not always easy. In 1993, in Brooklyn, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) became embroiled in an internal debate over the inclusion in Brooklyn schools of a curriculum that addressed gay and lesbian concerns. And the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), which five years ago was one the left's most vibrant national campus organiza-

tions, was ripped apart a couple of years ago over how to diversify the group's board and staff.

The biggest problem with the Alinsky model may not be the specific tenets of the sacred cows, but the single-issue politics they tend to produce. The seven cows represent an organizing model that is largely disconnected from institutions of representative government. In the United States, single-issue organizing has all but replaced party politics as the vehicle through which people on the left express their social needs and political desires. The right has not made this mistake.

The right's success at building an electoral majority is not lost on Sheila O'Farrell, who organizes nursing home workers in Florida for the Service Employees International Union's "Unite for Dignity Campaign." An organizer for 12 years, she was trained in the Alinsky tradition. She is now re-examining his methods. "I got my wake-up call in 1994," says O'Farrell. "I was working with Environmental Community Action in Georgia, organizing only around issues that people were concerned about, the hot issues. Members of our organization were buying into the conservative social agenda—on affirmative action or on gay and lesbian issues—and we left it alone because those weren't our issues." Then the Republicans swept into Congress, as members of O'Farrell's Georgia group voted for Newt Gingrich and his Contract With America. Now, she thinks her organizing strategies were partly to blame: "In the work we had done, we had missed presenting the big picture. Further, I think we taught some people on the far-right how to organize using an Alinsky-type model. To a large degree, Alinsky's nostrums work in terms of mobilizing people. But it depends on where you are going. Mobilized crowds have ended up in some dark alleys." ■



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TOXIC TECHNOLOGY

BY DAVID BACON

The railroad tank car sat for days on a siding at the Romic Corporation's waste transfer station in Redwood City, Calif., a working-class town halfway between San Francisco and the Silicon Valley. The used solvents it contained—effluent from the area's semiconductor and computer assembly plants—had long since been pumped away, leaving a knee-deep layer of toxic sludge.

The company decided that someone would have to climb into the tank and push the sludge down to the drain valve. The first worker tapped for the job refused, aware that the breathing apparatus required for working in the tank had been setting off alarms for dangerous concentrations of carbon monoxide.

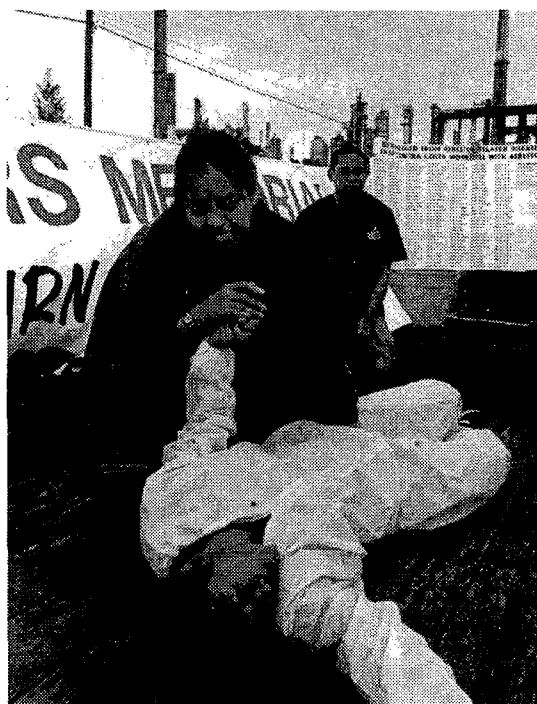
Then the supervisor called Rodrigo Cruz.

At 6:15 a.m. on February 15, 1995, Cruz, a Filipino immigrant, reported to the Redwood City facility. He'd worked for Romic for two years, but always at the main toxic waste storage yard in East Palo Alto, 15 miles away.

He was reluctant to go into the tank. He saw the duct tape wrapped around the coupling that connected the hose to the breathing apparatus he would wear. He'd never been trained to clean rail cars or even to use the breathing apparatus.

The supervisors were aware of the faulty equipment as well as the alarms that had scared off the first worker. But no one warned Cruz. He put a paper suit on over his clothes, donned the breathing apparatus and went in.

After pushing the sludge toward the drain for a couple of hours, Cruz began having trouble breathing. He came out and took a break, complaining that he wasn't getting enough air. As soon as he went back in, his breathing problems increased. Suddenly, he could get no air at all. He remembers a terrible smell and taste in his mouth. He tried pulling on the escape cord, which should have signaled that he was in trouble. Nothing happened. Somehow, he didn't fall into the sludge, where



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The Toxic Avengers, a street theater group, re-enact the accident that disabled Rodrigo Cruz while he was shoveling Silicon Valley sludge.


he almost certainly would have died. Instead, he managed to stagger back down the dark tank until he was under the hatch where he'd entered and caught the attention of someone above who hauled him out.

After stripping off the breathing apparatus and his paper suit, now smeared with the tank's waste, Cruz could still hardly breathe. No one offered him assistance. Finally, he lost consciousness and collapsed. Someone called 911, and an emergency medical team took him away in an ambulance.

Cruz didn't die, but the effects of that morning will last the rest of his life. He has excruciating headaches. His reflexes are shot and he has no sense of balance, making it impossible to drive or ride a bike. He also has trouble remembering things.

Doctors concluded that he suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning and oxygen deprivation down in the rail car. In addition, the sludge contained xylene, benzene, methyl ethyl

ketone and trichloroethane, all dangerous but commonly used solvents in electronics that can cause cancer and liver damage over time. Cruz has no way of knowing what he may suffer from years from now.

 In the popular imagination, the Silicon Valley is the hub of an information-processing industry powered by brainy computer programmers puzzling over intricate formulas. In reality, it is a huge manufacturing center with a work force of over a quarter of a million. In the heart of the industry, giant semiconductor plants manufacture chips and integrated circuits. These are the brains of the computers and electronic devices assembled in other Valley factories. Chips are made on production lines in a process called wafer fabrication, where they are bathed and baked in a large variety of extremely toxic solvents, acids and gases. Romic, which employs 200 people in the Valley, handles much of the toxic waste that these manufacturing plants produce.

Cruz worked at the bottom of the computer industry, one of thousands of Asian and Latino immigrants who do the jobs that bring the most chemical exposure and pay the least money. These workers are constantly exposed to low levels of toxic chemicals in the course of their work. Catastrophic accidents occasionally occur.

In the high tech work force, Asian immigrants make up 30 percent of skilled production workers, 47 percent of semiskilled workers and 41 percent of unskilled workers. Of the many Asian nationalities in the plants, Filipinos are by far the largest group. Latinos constitute 18 percent of skilled workers, 21 percent of semiskilled workers and 36 percent of unskilled workers. African-Americans constitute less than 7.5 percent of the electronics work force in any category.

For three months following that morning in the tank, Cruz traversed a gauntlet of Silicon Valley lawyers and social service agencies, looking for help. Romic was fighting Cruz's workers' compensation claim, and he was worried about how he would live, unable to work for perhaps the rest of his life. One afternoon, he walked through the door of the Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health (SCCOSH) in San Jose.

SCCOSH, founded in 1979 by electronics workers and health and safety activists, has a long history of battling the electronics industry over toxic contamination. "We want a workers' standard of justice," director JoLani Hironaka says. "Workers should be able to define adequate health and safety protection."

After years of relentless pressure from SCCOSH and its allies, the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) sponsored a study of 11 plants in 1992, seeking to prove exposure to toxic chemicals was not responsible for the high miscarriage rate among women in the industry. The SIA study, performed by University of California researchers, however, proved exactly the opposite. It found a direct connection between the use of ethylene glycols and miscarriages. SCCOSH then began a "Campaign to End the Miscarriage of Justice," which forced some of the largest companies to stop using these chemicals.

The SIA study results didn't surprise SCCOSH. Lawyers working with the center have repeatedly sued and filed workers'

Union Busting in the Valley

If Silicon Valley workers formed a union, they would have a better chance of forcing the industry to pay attention to their health and safety concerns. Yet the industry is doing everything in its power to prevent workers from organizing.

"Every worker in Silicon Valley knows that if you try to organize a union, a right which federal law is supposed to guarantee, you will probably lose your job," says Romie Manan, an organizer with the Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health (SCCOSH), who has participated in almost every union campaign in the Valley. "The electronics industry in Silicon Valley is the most anti-union industry in America."

Robert Noyce, who helped invent the transistor and founded Intel Corp., declared that "remaining non-union is an essential for survival for most companies."

Union busting, consequently, has a long track record in the Valley. In the middle of wage cuts and a big wave of layoffs in 1982, National Semiconductor Corp., Intel, Advanced Micro Devices and Phillips, among others, fired almost all of the leading union activists of that period, who had formed the Electronics Organizing Committee of the United Electrical Workers.

Electronics plants have been laboratories for developing personnel-management techniques that maintain "a union-free environment," such as the team-concept method for grouping workers on the plant floor. When the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled in 1992 that these techniques were illegal in some instances, Silicon Valley employers became the architects of the Team Act, which sought to legalize a modern-day form of company unionism. President Clinton vetoed the bill in 1996, but most observers expect it to resurface soon.

When union-prevention schemes don't work, electronics employers resort to more heavy-handed methods. When the Painters Union won the support of workers at Atari in the early '80s, the company closed its plant and moved offshore. When workers at Versatronex organized the Valley's first strike of production workers in 1992, that plant disappeared as well. Janitors at Hewlett Packard and Apple initially faced immigration raids and union busters before they finally won recognition.

The high level of repression facing Silicon Valley union activists means that the traditional organizing approach dependent on the NLRB's legal process doesn't work. Most Valley activists advocate a long-term approach of developing factory-floor leaders and using an organizing style that integrates the immigrant culture of the Valley's work force.

Filipinos, a key nationality among production workers, are generally in favor of joining unions, according to Manan. Trade unions are very popular in the Philippines, where a much higher percentage of workers are organized than in the United States. But like many immigrants, he says, Filipinos are reluctant to rock the boat because they are responsible for finding jobs for other family members, often in the same plant.

"We understand why Rodrigo Cruz went into the tank when he could see the danger," Manan says. "I know that when he looked at the tape around the air tube, he was thinking of his family, of all the people he had to feed. Workers aren't stupid, but we'll do things despite our misgivings because of fear of losing our jobs." —D.B.

compensation claims against most of the large manufacturers on behalf of workers disabled by exposure to toxins. The list includes industry giants such as Intel, National Semiconductor Corp., Hewlett Packard, IBM and Phillips. SCCOSH organized a Disabled Workers Group, forcing the industry to stop using dangerous solvents like 1,1,1-trichloroethylene. In two decades, the organization has become the main educational resource for Silicon Valley workers fighting to protect their health on the job.

At SCCOSH, Cruz found two Filipino immigrants like himself, Raquel Sancho and Romie Manan. Both are veteran organizers, with roots stretching back to the anti-Marcos movement in the Philippines. Over the previous year, they had been carefully organizing a network of Filipino electronics workers called Health WATCH (Workers Against Toxic Chemical Hazards).

"It was hard getting immigrant workers to picket the plants without having a long period of involvement with them around this issue," Sancho says. "No one would join us." So she set out to build a base of workers using her knowledge of Filipino culture. She went to karaoke bars and sang with workers. She went to malls to meet their families. She got herself invited to picnics and family gatherings.

"In the Philippines, we call this SI, or social investigation—getting to know the community," she explains. "I used to sell Saladmaster, sort of the Rolls Royce of pots and pans, going from friend to friend like people sell Amway or Tupperware. I used the same style to meet workers."

Sancho slowly developed a core of interested workers. In the first WATCH meetings, they told each other their life histories and discussed the chemicals used at work. Gradually, they began to talk about educating other workers and changing conditions in the plants.

When Cruz showed up at the SCCOSH office in 1995, WATCH members were ready, not just to listen to his story, but to take action on his behalf. They launched the "Campaign for Justice for Rodrigo Cruz," taking Cruz's case into the plants. Some workers, brave enough to risk angering management, wore buttons and ribbons to show solidarity.

WATCH also found allies in East Palo Alto, the African-American and Latino community surrounding Romic's main plant. It formed an alliance with the Ujima Security Council,

a group of residents concerned about living next to a toxic waste disposal site. The two groups organized joint demonstrations against Romic's plans to expand their facility.

Their activity kept Cruz's legal case alive and led to a larger investigation of the company. At the East Palo Alto site, California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (CalOSHA) inspectors found numerous health and safety violations, and issued 22 citations against Romic in 1996 for failing to label hazardous chemicals, to properly store chemicals and to have an emergency response plan or a trained fire brigade. Because these conditions endangered the surrounding neighborhood, Ujima became a complaining party in the CalOSHA proceedings, an unusual step for a community organization.

Initially, the agency's legal unit attempted to settle the East Palo Alto citations for an insignificant \$6,300 fine. WATCH and its allies took their complaints to the media and mobilized community pressure on John Howard, head of the division of the state Department of Industrial Relations responsible for CalOSHA. Howard refused to approve the proposed settlements, and Romic was finally forced in September to accept a penalty double that originally imposed.

The citations issued by CalOSHA in Cruz's case, however, have yet to be reviewed by a hearing officer. CalOSHA filed 25 citations against Romic over the rail car incident, which are being considered separately from those involving the East Palo Alto site. One count alone would fine the company \$62,500 for failing to give Cruz an adequate breathing apparatus, and another \$37,500 for failing to have a way of rescuing him from the tank. Romic declined to answer questions about the Cruz incident.

The trial over these citations has been put off until February. In the meantime, as a result of the CalOSHA investigation, SCCOSH has discovered that Romic's tank-cleaning operation was not being monitored by either the federal or state environmental protection agencies. Despite the transfer of thousands of pounds of chemicals at the Redwood City rail car site, the state's Air Quality Management District didn't even know the facility existed. ■

David Bacon is associate editor of Pacific News Service in San Francisco.

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WHAT
LEGAL
RIGHTS
SHOULD
KIDS HAVE?

Coming of Age

BY KATHARINE GREIDER

To hear politicians talk, you'd think children were a uniquely privileged group. Whether lamenting welfare cuts or the federal deficit, just about anyone with a point to make gets around to invoking the innocent child.

But as actual people, kids do not enjoy many of the political and civil rights that adults take for granted. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that principals can censor student newspapers that are at odds with the school's "educational mission" and that schools can test student athletes for illegal drugs without specific cause for suspicion. Cops aren't supposed to beat a criminal, but neither law nor tradition forbids parents from spanking their children. Children whose parents are warring over them in court may never have the opportunity to tell the judge what's in their own hearts. Though minors can usually get birth control and some forms of medical treatment without parental consent, they often lack the power to refuse treatment.

Advocates for children have traditionally concentrated on so-called "welfare rights": their right to a minimum standard

of living, basic health care and education, and freedom from exploitation in the work force or abuse at the hands of adults. Today, some activists argue that children must also have certain basic civil rights. More sophisticated than the "child liberationism" of the '70s—which in essence sought to abolish childhood, letting kids act like adults and suffer the consequences—this new sensibility acknowledges children's need for special protection. It, however, challenges the view that until they reach 18, kids are mere objects of adult authority and concern. No one wants to let 10-year-olds quit school or smoke cigarettes. But some advocates think kids should have a role in making school rules, be able to vote at 16 or publish their own ideas—even controversial ones.

Perhaps most importantly, they say, children should have the right to express their own views in legal proceedings that affect them. Groups like the National Child Rights Alliance (NCRA), formed by child abuse survivors who remember what it was like to have no legal recourse, and Justice for Children, founded by a former prosecutor fed up with the court system's failure to protect abused children, think kids need

The Christian Right Pushes Parental Rights

Over the past several years, conservative groups like Of the People, the Eagle Forum, the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family have campaigned for "parental-rights" legislation at the federal level and in more than 25 states. "While it is indisputable that children have rights," writes Gary Bauer, president of the Family Research Council, "parents traditionally have been considered the proper custodians of these rights."

The federal Parental Rights and Responsibilities Act, introduced in 1995 but never put to a vote, said no representative of government "shall interfere with or usurp the right of a parent to direct the upbringing of the child" and said parents have the right to control decisions about education, health, religious and moral issues and discipline, including corporal punishment. A 1996 bill in the New Hampshire state legislature, which failed to pass, would have required public schools to obtain written parental consent for children to participate in instruction about "nuclear war, nuclear policy, and nuclear classroom games; globalism, one-world government, or anti-nationalistic curricula ... education in human sexuality, including premarital sex ... masturbation, divorce, population control, the roles of males and females ... organic evolution, including Darwin's theory [and] Eastern mysticism."

A broad coalition of groups not known for their radical positions on children's rights—including the National Parent Teacher Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Education Association and the



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National Association of Social Workers—have come out against these parental-rights initiatives.

Opponents say these initiatives would allow parents to harry the public schools with litigation and ultimately to send their children to religious schools using taxpayer money. Social workers warn that the initiatives would create so strong a presumption in favor of parents that child abuse investigations would be seriously hampered. Doctors argue the initiatives would block minors from getting medical care related to sexually transmitted diseases, contraception and drug abuse. And pro-choice activists say the parental-rights initiatives would provide a back door for parental-consent requirements for abortion in states where these proposals have failed. —K.G.

legal standing—the right to initiate legal action independently of their caretakers—and the right to an attorney who will act as an advocate.

Nowhere would these rights prove more decisive than in legal wrangles over who will serve as a child's family. In the famous case of "Gregory K.," it was the 12-year-old's attempt to "divorce" his mother that made headlines, but the substantive legal issue was whether he had a right to go to court on his own behalf to seek termination of her parental rights. In 1993, the year after Gregory won his case, a Florida appeals court allowed him to stay with the foster parents he loved but reversed the finding that he had a right to sue in the first place.

The long-standing legal principle that cases involving children be decided according to their "best interests" does not guarantee the child a say in determining what those interests are. Although the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers recommends that court-appointed guardians should convey the wishes of the child, this is not always the case in practice. NCRA co-founder Jeanne Lenzer recalls a 9-year-old New York girl who told anyone who would listen to her that she did not want to go back to the mother who had killed her younger brother. Until NCRA intervened, the girl's court-

appointed guardian—who had never even met her—agreed with the child welfare agency that she be reunited with her mother. By the same token, the state often separates children from their parents against the children's wishes, sometimes for tendentious reasons such as a parent's homosexuality.

In her book *Children First*, child psychologist Penelope Leach espouses the Norwegian policy that gives the children of divorced parents the right to decide whether or not to visit the noncustodial parent. If such a policy were in place in the United States, a North Carolina judge couldn't have ordered that a 14-year-old girl be locked up for three days this past July because she refused to visit her father in Los Angeles.

Those who object to allowing minors to express their views about custody and visitation fear such rights would traumatize children and leave them vulnerable to manipulation. Writing in *Texas Lawyer*, one attorney argues that children's preferences about custody should be carefully excluded from evidence in divorce cases. "Sometimes, a child chooses a particular parent to make someone else feel good, to get what he or she wants, to avoid hurting one parent," writes Jolene Wilson-Glah. "[T]he desires of children to do what 'feels good' may be carrying more sway than teaching children

lessons that are not always fun."

But ignoring what children feel has its own consequences. The American public is repeatedly faced with disturbing images like that of 4-year-old "Baby Richard," shown on television two years ago clinging and crying "No!" as he was torn from the arms of his adoptive mother to be raised by biological parents he had never met.

The right to determine what happens to one's own body is another prerogative adults expect to exercise absolutely but that minors do not have in most cases. Courts have generally ruled that minors cannot consent to medical care unless they are married or living on their own and financially independent. Exceptions are sometimes made for prenatal care (in 27 states, according to a 1995 survey by the Alan Guttmacher Institute), treatment for sexually transmitted disease (49 states), contraceptive services (23 states) and mental health services (21 states).

One of the nastiest battles in youth rights has been over whether a young woman can consent to her own abortion. Thirty-nine states require her to get her parents' permission or inform them of her plans to abort. The issue is often cast as a dispute between parents and the state, with the pregnant minor as its passive object. A Pennsylvania woman was arrested two years ago for driving her son's 13-year-old girlfriend across state lines to get an abortion. She received probation, not for violating any abortion law—it's legal for minors to get an abortion in another state—but for violating the custody rights of the child's mother—"usurping a parent's control," according to the state Attorney General. In September, Ohio became the latest state to pass parental consent legislation. In commenting on the new law, its sponsor Jim Jordan erased the pregnant teenager's perspective from the equation. "Moms and dads make better decisions than a bunch of bureaucrats," he said.

Minors have little power to refuse medical treatment. In 1995, 16-year-old Billy Best ran away from his Massachusetts home to avoid another round of chemotherapy for his Hodgkin's disease. He left this note: "The reason I left is because I could not stand going to the hospital every week. I feel like the medicine is killing me instead of helping me." When he finally returned home, his parents relented and agreed to an unproven alternative therapy. While Best's cancer is now in remission, critics argue that he could have died after discontinuing chemotherapy. The nut of the issue is why an 18-year-old's right to refuse medical treatment is held sacred, while a 16-year-old has no legal say.

Adults can violate their children's physical integrity in other ways as well. The Dade County, Fla., school board voted in September to pull high school students out of class at random and test their urine for illegal drugs. As in the abortion cases, debate has centered on parents' rights. Schools will test only those students whose parents have given their written permission, and results will go only to parents. "It's total parental empowerment," the sponsoring school board member boasted following the vote.

Another area in which adults often give themselves *carte blanche* to restrict children is in their self-expression and access to ideas. Earlier this year, Ohio's public library system announced plans to install special software to restrict children's

access to offensive Internet material. The American Civil Liberties Union has sued, pointing out that the software inadvertently cuts off innocuous sites as well. According to People for the American Way (PFAW), the book most frequently targeted over the last 15 years has been John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Parents inevitably try to purge the offending book from the curriculum or library. And that isn't always necessary, says PFAW's Director of Education Policy Deanna Duby, because most school districts give parents the right to excuse their own kid from the class or assignment. The child, needless to say, has no say in the matter.

On the day they turn 18, children go from being dependents with few rights to adults who are expected to make decisions for themselves and contribute responsibly to society. Precisely because they are impressionable citizens-in-training, children's evolving capacity to make decisions should be nurtured. We know from the example of child abusers who were once abused themselves that what children learn about power is not so easily unlearned. What do kids learn when adults allow them no influence on important decisions that affect them, show no respect for their physical integrity and no restraint in restricting their speech? "Kids are our future," politicians are fond of saying. Meant to exalt children, this language implicitly dismisses them. It seems to say that children's value lies not in their basic humanity but in the fact that one day, they'll be like us. In other words, one day, they'll be running things. ■

Katharine Greider is a freelance writer in New York City. She last wrote for *In These Times* about child support ("On the Trail of Deadbeat Dads," February 17).

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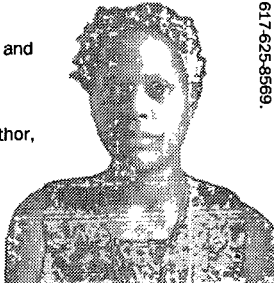
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'70s Movies, '90s Morality

Boogie Nights

Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson

The Ice Storm

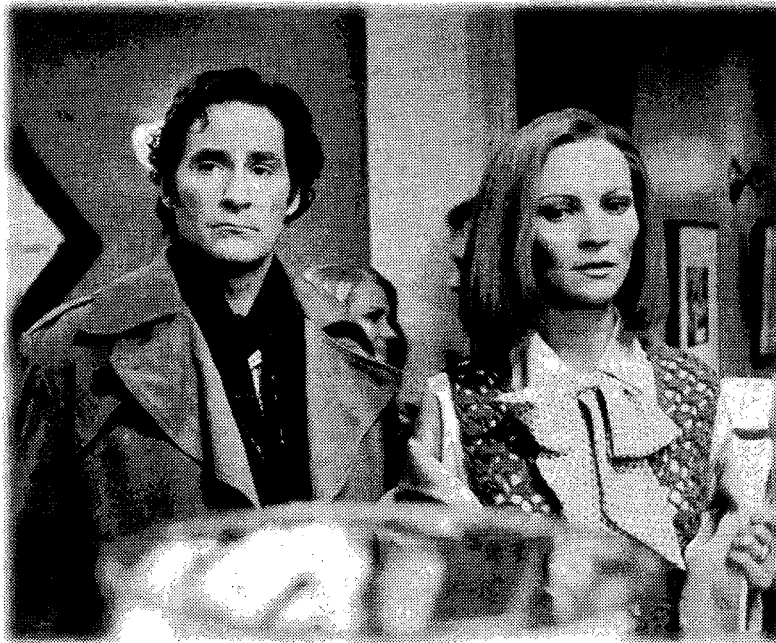
Directed by Ang Lee

REVIEWED BY
PAT DOWELL

You can buy new bell-bottom trousers in floral-print corduroy again. You can order CDs crammed with top-40 hits from the pre-Reagan era. John Travolta and Thomas Pynchon are stars. There's even been a revival of interest in blaxploitation movies. And the culture of the '70s is the subject of two of the year's most talked-up movies, *Boogie Nights* and *The Ice Storm*. The first is a saga of the adult-film industry covering 1977 to 1984, the years in which VCRs changed the economics and the style of Hollywood's bastard imitator. The second is a tightly compressed cautionary tale—following two families on one Thanksgiving weekend—of uncomfortable affluence and sexual experimentation in an upscale Connecticut suburb.

The two movies have more in common than shag carpets and rave reviews. Both are essentially domestic dramas with a decidedly '90s emphasis on the way sexual nonconformity destroys families, even surrogate ones.

In Paul Thomas Anderson's *Boogie Nights*, a 17-year-old underachieving boy, Eddie (Mark Wahlberg), fulfills his dream of becoming somebody important by parlaying a notoriously large penis into pornography stardom. Along the way in this ribald epic, he acquires a more-than-affectionate surrogate mom—Julianne Moore as a solicitous porn queen named Amber—to replace his own nagging mother who drove him out of her San Fernando Valley tract home. And he finds a



Kevin Kline and Joan Allen are husband and wife in Ang Lee's *The Ice Storm*.

soul sister in another sex star named Rollergirl, played by Heather Graham.

Eddie has a brief spectacular erection into celebrity as he transforms into self-proclaimed stud Dirk Diggler. Once known as rapper Marky Mark,

Wahlberg's bona fides have already appeared much larger than life on a Times Square billboard in Calvin Klein underwear. His claim to being a musician is as slim as Eddie's is to being an actor. Those who know their pop culture will see a sly reflection of the mainstream media, which is the most appealing part of *Boogie Nights*.

With Burt Reynolds playing producer/director Jack Horner, who dreams of creating adult film "art," the 26-year-old writer/director Anderson satirizes mainstream directors. What's the real difference between a big bruiser of a movie like *Con Air* or *The Peacemaker*, which are pornographic in their fixation on cruelty and violence, and one of Jack Horner's explicit sexual sagas? Only production values.

Boogie Nights portrays the ambitions of Horner's film family as pathetic—an absurd reduction of the American dream—and almost innocent, destroyed by the changing times and the introduction of cocaine and home video. There's not much exploitation on display in Horner's happy household—indeed it's only when Dirk gets too big for his britches, so to speak, and coke inflates his self-image that he strays from his cine-

matic Dad and pays a price. He returns to life as Eddie the hustler, selling sex to strange men.

When he eventually returns to a forgiving Jack Horner, he resumes his stardom in desperate drudgery, a prisoner of sex. This clearly reflects how Hollywood's rich and famous are the prisoners of the vacuous thrill machine they've created. But that message is not the primary point of this film. Nor is its nostalgic re-creation of the '70s; *Boogie Nights* is only tangentially nostalgic for disco and leisure suits. Rather *Boogie Nights* uses the past to explain and justify today's sexual puritanism. It assumes a contemporary vantage point, presuming the bedrock of an individual's happiness is family life. One of the fascinations of the '70s was the idea that one could escape from the confines of family relationships. Viewed from a '90s perspective, that was a mistake.

Eddie creates a family that loves him, loses them, and comes back to them. Father Jack keeps his promise of paternal love and refuge. The importance of nuclear family, even an odd one like Jack Horner's, is emerging as a major theme of the '90s. So is a queasiness about sex and sexuality.

The discomfort with sex that runs through *Boogie Nights* is the major theme in *The Ice Storm*. In New Canaan, Conn., one of the early bedroom communities, two affluent families are falling apart as they try to absorb the opportunities of the sexual revolution. The setting is the Watergate year of 1973 during Thanksgiving weekend when a dangerous ice storm brings out the real big chill in these upper middle-class households.

Despite the utopian name, New Canaan is not a promised land. The Carvers and the Hoods are friends and neighbors knit together by the parents' adultery and their children's sexual discovery—secrets and lies, in other words.

The lies are not the falsehoods and betrayals that people use to gain power, but are merely told to hide illicit sex. When moral lightweight Ben Hood (Kevin Kline) feels he's on the verge of saying something meaningful to his lover Janey Carver (Sigourney Weaver), she reminds him that she has a boring husband and doesn't need another. "Ah yes," he says to no one in particular, "we're having an affair, an explicitly sexual relationship."

These people know nothing about each other, no matter how few walls and doors separate them. Their children are also ignorant; the first fumbblings of sex among the teenagers are absent of any passion. The adults are more knowing, but no wiser. Sex is never safe, even in this world before AIDS.

Janey is the movie's least domestic woman and the most repellent opportunist. Meeting a lover at her own home, she calmly gets out of bed on the pretext

of fetching her birth control and takes off in her car, leaving a baffled Ben in his shorts. Only mildly irritated, he hangs out awaiting her return, managing to catch his 14-year-old daughter Wendy (Christina Ricci) engaged in heavy petting in the basement with Janey's son Mikey (Elijah Wood).

Wendy is the only character who gives a real sense of the times. She not only follows the developments of the Watergate scandal with fervent concentration, but when called upon to give Thanksgiving grace, she sardonically thanks God "for letting us white people kill all the Indians." She calls her Dad a fascist and dons a Nixon mask while fooling around with Mikey.

Mikey, a dreamy underachiever, has the role of the movie's holy, doomed fool, but it is Wendy who seems to baffle and scare screenwriter James Schamus and director Ang Lee—just as the adult Janey does. Wendy instigates the movie's queasiest sexual moments when she tries to engage a frightened pre-teen, Sandy Carver (Adam Hann-Byrd), in sexual play. *The Ice Storm* shares *Boogie Nights*' disenchantment with sex in all its forms, an attitude that is an artifact of the '90s, not the '70s.

The high school band in *The Ice Storm* plays the pop hit "There's Got to Be a Morning After," which at the time was a kitsch anthem of hope, reassuring viewers of *The Poseidon Adventure* that the cast would be rescued. In *The Ice Storm*, it's clearly a warning to the audience of impending disaster. Just like conservatives in Congress, Hollywood thinks we're still being punished for the '60s. ■

Pat Dowell reports on movies for National Public Radio.

The Liberal Persuasion



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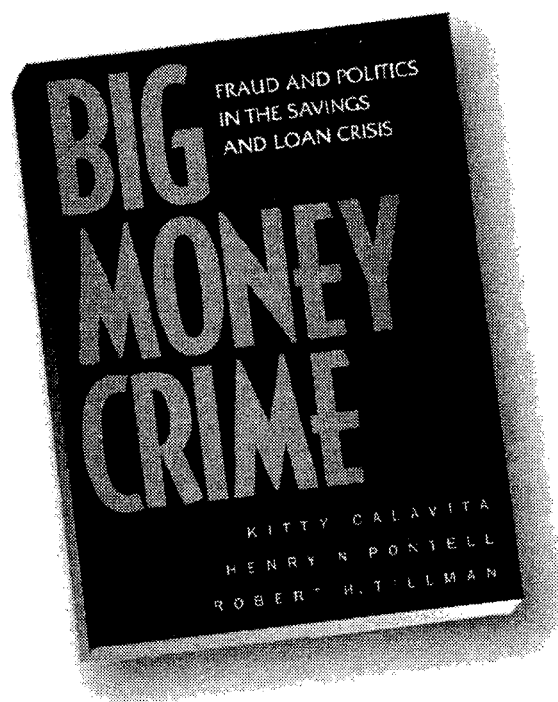
The Bank Robbers

Big Money Crime: Fraud and Politics in the Savings and Loan Crisis

By Kitty Calavita, Henry N. Pontell
and Robert H. Tillman

University of California Press
263 pages, \$27.50

REVIEWED BY J.W. MASON



Between 1981 and 1989, more than 2,000 Savings & Loans went bankrupt. These institutions were federally insured; their depositors were reimbursed by the U.S. government, at a cost of about \$250 billion—plus an equivalent amount in interest payments over the next decade, since the money for the bailout had to be borrowed. Today the S&L industry, for decades a source of much of this country's home lending, effectively no longer exists.

Though the S&L failures did not—as some in the late '80s feared—segue into a broader banking crisis, they raise deep questions about the stability of the U.S. banking system. In a modern, regulated financial system, how could such a disaster come about? Ask a thoughtful banker or business journalist this question, and you'll probably get an answer something like this:

It begins with interest rates. Before 1982, S&Ls (or thrifts) were required, by law, to accept deposits at moderate interest rates and then to invest the money only in 30-year, fixed rate mortgages. In the '70s, when inflation and interest rates skyrocketed, depositors demanded higher interest, but the

returns on the home loans were fixed. Even the best-run thrifts lost money hand-over-fist when they were collecting 8 percent on their loans but couldn't attract deposits without paying 10 percent. By 1981, four-fifths of the country's thrifts were insolvent.

At this point, regulators could have started liquidating insolvent thrifts, spending a few billion dollars to reimburse insured depositors. But instead, under the influence of generous contributions from S&L operators and an ideological fixation on the virtues of unregulated markets, Congress tried to let the heavily regulated industry "grow its way out of its problems." The Garn-St. Germain bill, passed in 1982, abolished the restrictions on what interest an S&L could offer and what it could invest in. The theory was that entrepreneurial thrift owners could now offer higher interest rates to attract more deposits, then invest the money profitably enough to make up for the losses on the old, low-interest home loans.

The result was a situation in which thrift operators had an almost irresistible incentive to seek out the riskiest investments they could find. To make

up for the below-market returns on their existing assets, and for the very high interest rates they now offered depositors, they had to find investments with substantially above-market returns—and the first rule of finance is, higher returns mean higher risk. If the investments went bad, well, the institution was already insolvent. And depositors couldn't care less, because their savings were federally insured. In this version of the story, deliberate fraud and embezzlement are acknowledged but play a minor role. Whether thrift operators were honest or dishonest, competent or incompetent, the circumstances of the industry pushed them all toward the same risky, unsound investments.

In *Big Money Crime*, Kitty Calavita, Henry N. Pontell and Robert H. Tillman (the first two professors of "social ecology" and the last a sociologist) take a different view. As they bluntly put it, "bad men and women" were as important in the thrift crisis as "bad government and a bad economy." They argue that "deliberate insider fraud was at the very center of the disaster." The thrift crisis should be seen as a kind of financial wilding, as "collective embezzlement" in complete

defiance of legality or good business practice. As for the perpetrators, they made up "vast networks of sophisticated offenders," Texas good ol' boys' answer to the Gambino family (a comparison *Big Money Crime* doesn't shy from). For Calavita, Pontell and Tillman, the S&L crisis is best viewed not through the lens of economics, but of criminology.

Whatever their idiosyncracies, corrupt thrift operators, almost all located in the West or Southwest, tended to use the same techniques. The drill—leaving aside those who just stashed their deposits in a numbered account in the Cayman Islands—went like this: You make a loan to a friend, to an associate or—if you can disguise it—to yourself that you know the borrower will never repay. Then you lend more money, so that the real estate venture or leveraged buyout or whatever you were supposedly financing can appear (to regulators) to be making its interest payments. Finally, you cash in, either through a direct kickback from the borrower, or by having your board vote you big salaries and bonuses for making such shrewd investments, or—if your loan was to someone associated with another corrupt S&L, as it usually was—by having your counterpart there make a similar loan to you.

The problem—besides the numerous laws you've broken—is that to make it look like you're running a genuine thrift, your co-conspirators can't simply keep the money you give them; they have to invest most of it in strip malls that will never open and luxury condos unfit for human habitation. So to make off with \$1 million, you may have to waste \$10 million—or \$100 million. This is why it's plausible to attribute the \$250 billion losses of the thrift industry to fraud, even though no one claims that corrupt thrift operators stole nearly that much.

All this is laid out clearly and with appropriate anger by the authors. But what does it add up to? The impressive list of corrupt thrifts they've assembled (mainly from prosecutors' records) were responsible for but a small fraction of the bad loans granted in the '80s. To make collective embezzlement "the very center of the disaster," they have to proceed, as they put it, "deduc-

**The thrift crisis
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tively": They reason that too many S&Ls bet their depositors' money on long shots for their motivations to have been anything but criminal.

But thrift operators' risky loans don't prove they were crooks: By the early '80s, most S&Ls faced bankruptcy unless they took desperate measures; at the same time, regulations were being abolished and "entrepreneurialism" hysterically praised. Imagine four thrift operators. One "gambles for resurrection," making risky loans in the sincere hope of reviving his institution; another, who's never dealt with anything but simple mortgages, is cleaned out by the sharpies at Salomon Brothers; another is caught up in the euphoria of real-estate prices that seem never to go down; and yet another is a criminal who makes loans to his friends that he knows they'll never repay. In all four cases, the outcome could be exactly the same: miles of empty condos along Texas' I-30 and a bailout for depositors from the U.S. government. Calavita, Pontell and Tillman may be right that the last group was more numerous than most people have acknowledged, and they are certainly right that they got off lightly, con-

sidering how much they stole. But, in the end, all this yields is the unsurprising conclusion that robbing a bank with a six-gun gets treated more harshly than robbing it with a fountain pen.

Only a few years before the S&L disaster, America's biggest banks, flush with deposits from the oil-rich Middle East, made enormous, enormously risky loans to Third World governments. The same interest rate surge that killed the S&Ls brought these Third World borrowers to the brink of default, and the banks, like the S&Ls, required a government bailout, which was organized by Treasury Secretary James Brady. No one suggests the white-shoe bankers who made these loans were criminals, but they risked vast sums of their depositors' money as recklessly as "Fast Eddie" McBirney and his Texas pals. And the social consequences were far worse: round after round of austerity for the Third World as a condition for rescheduling the debt. You don't have to break any laws in order to cause vast social harm.

Instead of looking for big money crimes, we should be investigating, with post-Keynesian economists like Hyman Minsky, the problems of financial fragility. And instead of calling for the imprisonment of more thrift operators, richly though they may deserve it, we should be asking, with Keynes, whether productive investment can survive "as a bubble on a whirlpool of speculation," or whether a stable and equitable prosperity must eventually require the "euthanasia of the rentier."

If readers don't expect this larger perspective, they won't be disappointed with the book, though the same story has already been told, with more gore and journalistic flair, in *The Big Fix* by James Ring Adams and *High Rollers* by Martin Lowy. *Big Money Crime* begins with the line (taken from a Congressional hearing on the S&Ls), "The best way to rob a bank is to own one." If we had begun with Mack the Knife's question, "What is robbing a bank, next to founding one?"—well, now that would have been a different book. ■

J.W. Mason is a former culture editor of In These Times.

The Rise of Hip Capitalism

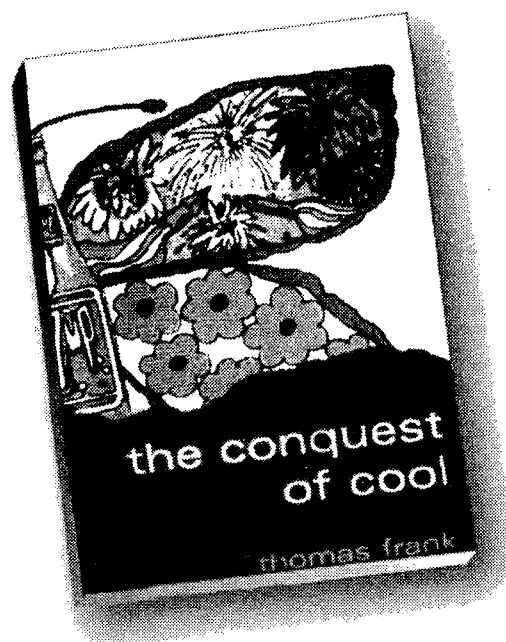
The Conquest of Cool

By Thomas Frank

University of Chicago Press

287 pages, \$22.95

REVIEWED BY JACKSON LEARS



The search for turning points in history is always a risky business, and it is even riskier when the allegedly pivotal moments occurred less than 30 years ago. Still a case can be made that the events of February 1968 revealed a sea change in American life. The Tet offensive demonstrated that North Vietnamese resistance was far stronger than American policy-makers had assumed. Polls indicated that, for the first time, popular opposition to the Vietnam War counterbalanced support for it. And Johnny Carson wore a Nehru jacket on the *Tonight Show*.

Why include an event as seemingly trivial as Carson's wardrobe in a catalogue of fundamental social changes? In *The Conquest of Cool*, Thomas Frank suggests that the Nehru jacket epitomizes the coming of age of corporate hip. For nearly a decade, advertising and fashion industry executives had been jettisoning the gray flannel emblems of '50s conformity. By the late '60s, the spread of youthful rebelliousness and the proliferation of countercultural styles provided marketers with a whole new visual vocabulary, which they exploited relentlessly. Yet even before the first mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War, Frank argues, advertisers had assembled the

rhetorical strategies for transforming political protest into hip consumption.

Cartoonish accounts of the '60s counterculture remain central to contemporary public discourse. Mass media representations of the counterculture separate political from cultural radicals and caricature both groups, dismissing the first as humorless totalitarians, the second (and far larger) as self-indulgent acid-heads. More sympathetic observers see the counterculture as an authentic (if naive) dissent against corporate conformity, a protest that was quickly co-opted by the institutions it sought to subvert. This group, according to Frank, includes most "academics and responsible writers."

Frank challenges the "responsible" account of co-optation by arguing that the counterculture was neither as authentic, nor the business culture as conformist, as the received wisdom implies. He is right on target about recent managerial thought; his account of the rise of hip capitalism and its calamitous consequences is convincing and significant. In the process, though, he assumes that the marketers' view of their audience is the most accurate one. Remember Carson's Nehru jacket. Frank says it inaugurated "an overnight mania for the garment." This may or

may not be true. (No one I knew in February 1968 would have worn the clownish costume except as a joke.) Frank sees the counterculture through the eyes of men who were professionally committed to sniffing the air for superficial trends and packaging the population into marketing segments. This does not promote a nuanced or a particularly original picture.

Frank's picture of American business, on the other hand, is fresh and compelling. When it came to alienation, he argues, the advertising and fashion industries beat the counterculture to the punch. Long before the 1967 "Summer of Love," innovative marketers had embraced the critique of mass society and applied it to the sclerotic operations of the American corporation. Through the '50s, from this critical perspective, admen were organization men like any other—sniveling sycophants catering to clients' whims, trapped in the inane logic of "scientific" advertising. The chief expositor of this logic was Rosser Reeves, the executive at the Ted Bates Company who coined the term "unique selling proposition" to dignify the banal, repetitive sloganeering of the era. Advertising of the '50s seemed either self-parodic or sinister, the butt of satires in *Mad* magazine and the target

of such critics as Vance Packard, who warned that advertisers were manipulating consumers into mass conformity.

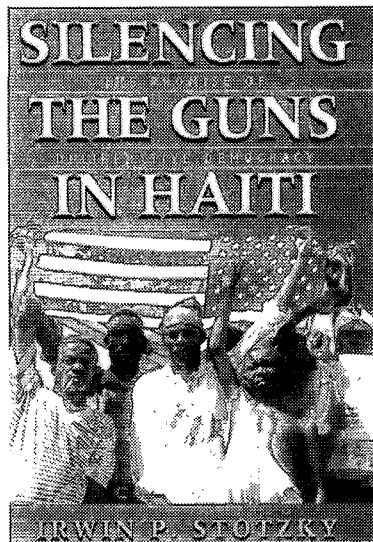
Then came the transformation advertising historians call the "Creative Revolution." Frank is normally skeptical of such inflated phrases, but he agrees that the early '60s were "a time of fantastic ferment in managerial thought and practice." Much of the initial ferment emanated from the firm of Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB), where copywriters led by Bill Bernbach produced advertisements for products ranging from Volkswagen to Avis car rental to Levy's Jewish Rye. This advertising distinguished itself from the unique selling proposition's empty bluster not merely through ironic understatement and apparent candor: DDB advertising also incorporated the critique of Packard and other mass society theorists. The Volkswagen campaigns assured the reader that his purchase of a Volkswagen would demonstrate his superiority over the common herd of consumers—all those dupes who fell for the ludicrous technobabble of the Detroit manufacturers, who bought into the program of planned obsolescence under the guise of stylistic novelty. Frank succinctly summarizes this sort of appeal (which was also made successfully by Volvo during these years): "Alienated by the conformity and hypocrisy of mass society? Have we got a car for you!"

Chanting mantras of creativity, the new advertisers hailed the emerging youth culture of the '60s as "a symbolically in their own struggles against the mountains of deadweight procedure and hierarchy that had accumulated over the years." The identification and coronation of the "Pepsi Generation" in 1964 foreshadowed much of the youth worship later in the decade. All the dualisms were already in place: youth vs. age, hip vs. square, the repressive past vs. the liberated present and future. By 1967, advertising "creatives" were capering about in curly locks and bell bottoms, seeking every opportunity to suck up to the "Now Generation." The term encapsulated what advertisers thought was the consuming potential of the young: "their desire for immediate gratification, their craving for the new, their intolerance for the slow-moving, the penurious, the

thrifty." Rhetorical solidarity with the rebellious young brought broader changes in the world of advertising. For example, pseudo-feminism emerged as an advertising gimmick in the Pond's Hand Cream advertising campaign of 1969, which transfigured its imagined buyers from genteel ladies to skeptical nonconformists.

Out of this hip alliance came a permanent change in the culture of American capitalism, or at least in the facade it presented to the public. Grey flannel earnestness was out; blue denim irony was in. In the new rhetoric of advertising, buying things became less a means of fitting in than of standing out, of demonstrating one's free-spirited resistance to the demands of social propriety. The cure for the conformity induced by mass consumption was "more consumption!"—but consumption with an attitude: fuck you and hooray for me. Hobbes had bought a Harley. Capitalism, at last, was cool. And it would stay cool long after the last of the demonstrators had disappeared from the dean's office. By the end of the century, a new generation would appear—"Generation X," the mass media dubbed them, with characteristic flair—only to be described, for all their newness, with the same language that advertisers had used to characterize their predecessors in the "Now Generation": savvy, insouciant, rule-breaking. As Frank concludes, under the aegis of hip capitalism, "We will always have new generations of youth rebellion as certainly as we will have new generations of mufflers or toothpaste or footwear."

This is a powerful and important argument. Unlike many practitioners of cultural studies, whose celebrations of consumer sovereignty merely mimic advertising mythology, Frank acknowledges the centrality of corporate strategies in shaping our dominant values. Marketing campaigns, particularly if they are part of an industry-wide trend, can have cultural consequences whether or not they succeed in selling a particular product. *The Conquest of Cool* helps us understand why, throughout the last third of the 20th century, Americans have increasingly confused gentility with conformity, irony with protest, and an extended middle finger with a pop-



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ulist manifesto. Frank deftly shows the myriad ways that advertising has redefined radicalism by conflating it with in-your-face consumerism.

Like *The Baffler*, the magazine Frank edits, *The Conquest of Cool* is a bracing read. Frank's prose style is vigorous, his perceptions sharp and witty, his argument compelling. His voice is an exciting addition to the soporific public discourse of the late 20th century.

But there are problems with his glib dismissal of the counterculture. From Bob Dylan's poor impersonation of Woody Guthrie to the painfully pretentious lyrics of the Doors, Frank writes, "the relics of the counterculture reek of affectation and phoniness, the leisure-dreams of white suburban children like those who made up so much of the Grateful Dead's audience of the 1970s and 1980s." Since Frank looks at countercultural values through the lens of advertising and mass media, what he sees should come as no surprise: a monolithically silly montage of go-go, day-glo and paisley, of fatuous slogans and ridiculous revolutionary posturing. He rounds up the usual suspects, from Jerry Rubin to Iron Butterfly, and comes to the usual conclusion: They were a bunch of frauds. A closer look would have revealed more complexity.

Frank's mistake is to infer the countercultural values from the fantasies of advertisers. The counterculture was less frivolous and more fractured than Frank allows. Even its advertised version suggested fissures he fails to explore. As he observes, when American carmakers finally tried to catch up with the Creative Revolution, they created a series of silly faux-anarchist campaigns: the "Dodge Rebellion," the Pontiac "Break Away," the "Youngmobiles." Frank observes that these tropes were meant to link lumbering vehicles with youthful nonconformism. Yet he also notes that Volkswagen and Volvo, meanwhile, continued to emphasize authenticity and durability. What he does not see is that the distance between the two appeals suggested some of the range and complexity of countercultural values—even within the limited realm of consumer taste.

But the more important point is this: The counterculture was not just about consumption and its discontents; it was political in the largest sense. The most enduring countercultural values were not shaped in a consumer bazaar of "alternative lifestyles." They were rooted in revulsion at the bureaucratic rationality that pervaded military as well as civilian institutions, the frame of mind that sanctioned the Vietnam War and the nuclear arms race. Some members of the counterculture saw bureaucratic rationality and frenetic consumerism as the two poles in the destructive, oscillating cycle of production and consumption. They wanted out. They soon discovered that escape was more easily imagined than achieved. Still they muddled through. Without rejecting carnival or playfulness, they tried to refashion nonconformity outside corporate auspices. Their political and ethical commitments, however unfashionable, tended to last, and they did not show up in advertisements. ■

Jackson Lears is a history professor at Rutgers University. He is working on a book about grace, luck and fortune in American cultural history.



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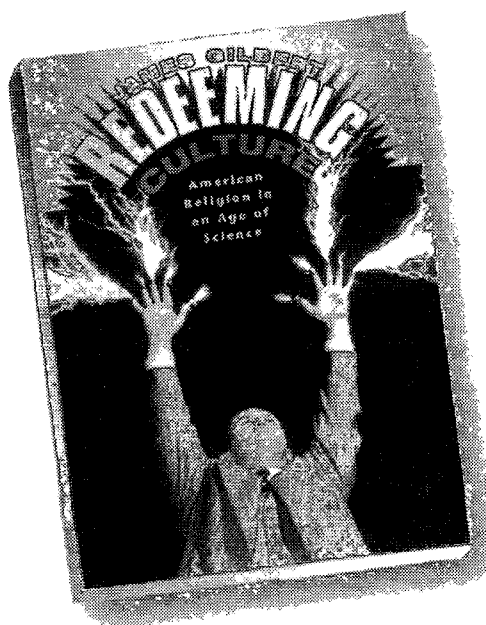
**Redeeming Culture:
American Religion in an Age of Science**

By James Gilbert

University of Chicago Press

407 pages, \$28.95

REVIEWED BY ROBERT WESTBROOK



These days, scientists are no more immune to a nostalgia for the '50s than other Americans. That decade, after all, witnessed the founding of the National Science Foundation and much of the rest of the expensive apparatus of government-supported "big science." The '50s were also an era in which the natural sciences—physics, in particular—laid claim to unprecedented authority within universities and in much of the wider culture as the model of the effective quest for truth. But the story of those presumably halcyon days for science is a good deal more complicated. As James Gilbert reveals in *Redeeming Culture*, proponents of a religious world view mounted an often successful resistance to science's claim as the sole repository of truth.

Gilbert characterizes the immediate postwar decades as "a world without John Dewey." This is not a bad way of thinking about the period. Not only did Dewey, the preeminent American philosopher and proponent of scientific intelligence, die in 1952, but his call in the '30s for a "common faith" that would put an end to conflict between the competing claims of science and religion was, by then, a dead letter. Religious experience, Dewey contended, was not about securing truth—that function could be safely left to science—but about imaginatively grasping the richest

possibilities that human experience afforded. It was a matter, as he put it, of "having," not knowing. Religious spokesmen, he argued, had provoked a bitter and unnecessary conflict with science by refusing to concede the realm of truth to science, believing wrongly that something significant was at stake for religion in continuing to press unverifiable knowledge claims about a supernatural God and His attributes. As a result, they did as much damage to religion as to science.

Not surprisingly, the defenders of more conventional notions of religion proved unwilling to surrender the realm of truth to science. By the onset of World War II, Dewey found himself at the center of a vigorous attack on the claims of science to exclusive epistemological authority. Many of Dewey's critics gathered at the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, founded in 1940 and headed by Rabbi Louis Finkelstein. Although the conference included several scientists who were eager to defuse the acrimony that Dewey's views elicited among religious intellectuals, it was more readily identified with such figures as Mortimer J. Adler (whom Gilbert nicely labels a "higher fundamentalist"). Adler declared at the group's first meeting that anti-religious philosophers such as Dewey posed a greater threat to democracy than Hitler and hence should be "liquidated."

In the face of such criticism, coupled with the fears instilled by the birth of an atomic age for which scientists had served as midwife, the most that the defenders of science could hope for after the war was an uneasy coexistence with those laying claim to higher truths.

Gilbert suggests persuasively that the persistence of religious truth claims at the level of both elite debate and popular sentiment rested in large part on a

**The Moody
Institute's Moon
stood on a
darkened stage
and transmitted
electricity
through his body,
shooting bolts of
lightning from his
fingertips.**

refusal to abandon the "argument from design." This argument, at the heart of "natural theology" since the 18th century, claimed that the complex patterns and processes of nature were inexplicable apart from a designing intelligence that created them. In other words, an intricate, well-oiled, watch-like world necessarily implied a watchmaker God. Darwinian evolutionary theory undermined the logical force of the argument from design by offering a wholly naturalistic explanation for the origin of species and organic evolution, but Darwinism could not disprove the argument, only render it superfluous for those who did not feel the need for it.

Gilbert documents the stubborn hold of the argument from design on the American imagination in several well-chosen, if loosely linked, case studies. Although die-hard proponents of the argument sometimes launched a direct assault on Darwinism (and offered an alternative "creationist science"), the more commonplace strategy was simply to ignore Darwinism and rest content with an unfalsifiable and more emotionally satisfying alternative.

The story of the persistence of the argument from design that Gilbert tells in the fullest and richest detail is that of Irwin Moon and the Moody Institute of Science. Moon was a Protestant evangelical educated at the Bible institutes that fostered the fundamentalist revolt against modernity. In the '30s, Moon began to preach a series of popular "Sermons from Science." In these sermons, which quickly garnered a wide and enthusiastic audience, Moon opened the "book of nature" by conducting laboratory-like demonstrations of the laws of science, which he then interpreted as clear evidence of God's handiwork. In one such demonstration (illustrated on the marvelous cover of *Redeeming Culture*), Moon stood on a darkened stage and transmitted electricity through his body, shooting spectacular bolts of lightning from his fingertips.

In the mid-'40s, with the backing of Chicago's Moody Bible Institute, Moon established the Moody Institute of Science in Los Angeles and began making films in which, as Gilbert says, "the magic of the camera could dress the tenets of Old Testament science in the

garment of virtual reality." These movies—*God of Creation*, *God of the Atom*, *Hidden Treasures* and others—combined extraordinary technical achievement in presenting the findings of natural science on film with a clear and unequivocal treatment of those findings as evidence of God's work in the world. Moon's movies reached huge audiences in the early postwar years, in part because they served as a centerpiece of efforts by the Armed Forces to mold the character of their troops. Among the apparent admirers of Moon's work was Hollywood director Frank Capra, a devout Catholic who himself made several science documentaries for television in the '50s that were infused less with the spirit of science than with that of St. Francis.

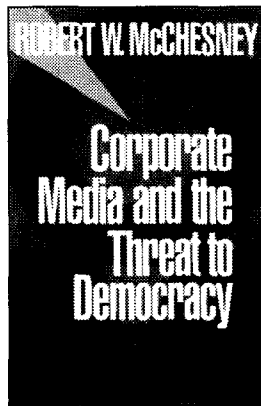
Religious Americans not only aggressively protected the argument from design but also freely expressed anxieties about scientific infringements on the heretofore untestable limits on the scope of human inquiry. As big science moved steadily toward extraterrestrial exploration, a sharp debate broke out between those inclined to view this dra-

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matic break with earthbound existence merely as travel into *outer space* and those who regarded it as a hubristic breach of *heaven*.

At the same time, these clashing perspectives were mirrored in another debate over the nature and meaning of the flying saucers that Americans were suddenly sighting in record numbers. In the first six months of 1952 alone, American newspapers filed 16,000 reports of UFOs. The Air Force found itself fighting off amateur critics who accused military officials of suppressing evidence of alien visitors come to earth to issue divine warnings about the arrogance of human science.

Gilbert also considers the generally unsuccessful efforts by scientists to deflect various amalgams of conventional religion and science. These preemptive moves ranged from the indefatigable yet ever frustrated attempts of astronomer Donald Menzel (a technical advisor to Capra and the leading debunker of UFO spiritualism) to shape popular science in a largely secular direction to the endeavors of his colleague Harlow Shapley and others to

formulate a new rational religion derived wholly from the work of scientists. This latter venerable enterprise produced the usual cold pantheism that excites interest only at a back table in the Harvard faculty club.

Above all, scientists tried to convince their fellow citizens that they constituted their own international "republic" of elite inquiry entitled to float free of the religious scruples of ordinary folk and the nationalist agenda of the American republic. At the same time, they pleaded with the benighted masses and the managers of the national security state to fund the research of their independent republic from the public coffers. This was a politically difficult argument to make at any time but one particularly ill-suited to the Cold War, when little that the federal government did came without anti-Communist strings attached.

Gilbert's own perspective on all this is difficult to discern, since he rarely argues with his subjects. He is intent, however, on persuading us of the intractability of the tension between religion and science. Such a contention is difficult to discount these days, when

the authority of science is under assault not only from a resurgent fundamentalism but also from a postmodernist skepticism that threatens scientists in once-secure precincts such as the university. Caught between believers who would make Truth divine and doubters who would put "truth" in quotation marks, scientists feel understandably beleaguered.

John Dewey's terms for an armistice between science and religion, which it is hard to imagine even he thought would be well-received in his own time, are more unlikely than ever to secure a hearing today. While Dewey was no doubt correct that "meaning is wider in scope as well as more precious in value than is truth," he, like many scientists, overestimated the human capacity to sustain a conviction of meaning and hope without the sort of comforting truth claims that science alone can never make. ■

Robert Westbrook teaches history at the University of Rochester and is the author of *John Dewey and American Democracy*.

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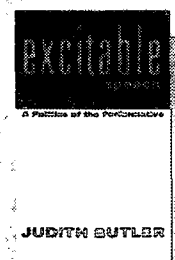
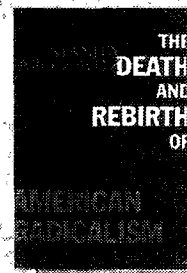
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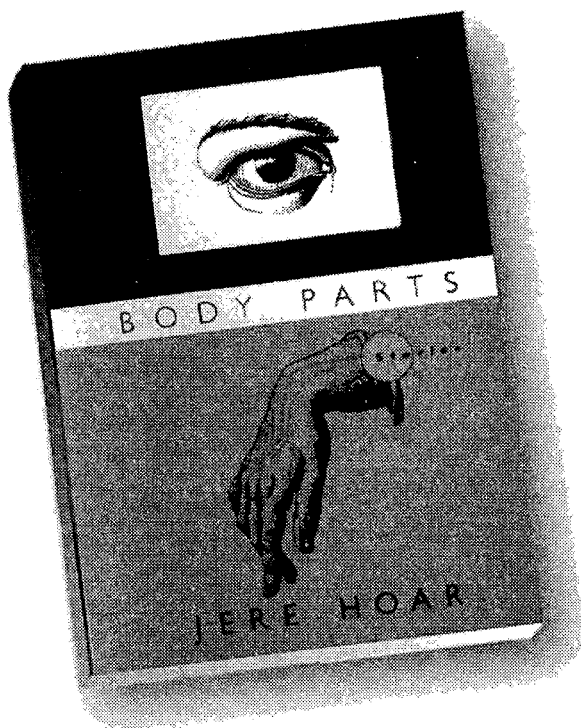
Body Parts

By Jere Hoar

University Press of Mississippi

286 pages, \$26

REVIEWED BY MEREDITH SUE WILLIS



Thousands of women wait impatiently for Terry McMillan's next novel because they see their own lives in her work. Much genre fiction is snapped up because it feeds deep psychological needs. But who will be the readers of the beautifully rendered stories in Jere Hoar's *Body Parts*?

Set in towns and rural areas with names like Troy, Ala., and Russell's Landing, Miss., Hoar's tales will certainly be welcomed by regional readers, but the true home place of these stories will be on the bookshelves of people who love language, well-made narratives and literary allusions. The opening story in the collection, for example, "Tell Me It Hasn't Come to This," echoes the world of Flannery O'Connor, where rural Southern women are wooed or stalked (or both at once) by earthy and threatening strangers. The echoes, however, are part of a conversation with O'Connor's stories, not merely an imitation of them. Perhaps Hoar's best audience would be the writers who went before. Almost every story makes some

reference to other literature, and comparisons to O'Connor and William Faulkner are by no means always to the advantage of the more famous writer.

Indeed, Hoar's carefully crafted prose moves on the page like shooting stars across a dark sky. Whether writing in dialect, graceful standard English or the idiosyncratic voice of an authentic American pure product gone crazy, Hoar skillfully weaves together time, place, personality and emotional state. The 16-year-old teller of "A Brave Damn-Near Perfect Thing" says, "When we talk our words buzz past each other without significant guidance, like Hitler's missiles," and the imagery is precisely right for a slightly bookish, sexually overcharged boy just at the end of World War II.

Or again, in "The Snopes Who Saved Huckaby," a preacher is asked if he knows Jesus, and he replies, "I never had the pleasure. Old God was the one called me, and I been as faithful as any dog." There are reams of theology here, as well as commentary on a society in

The building blocks of these stories are parts of bodies: bellies, breasts, nubs of amputated limbs, haunches, paunches, bulbous noses, unruly penises, tiny white feet at the end of the wrong leg, and dismemberments.

which people believe they can have special pipelines to the Deity, democratically if peculiarly their own.

The building blocks of all these stories are, as the collection title suggests, parts of bodies: bellies, breasts, nubs of amputated limbs, haunches, paunches, bulbous noses, unruly penises, tiny white feet at the end of the wrong leg, and dismemberments. In the first part of the collection, the stories have a faint aura of nostalgia, even when what is being told is painful. In the sad but energetic "My Father's Voice, Lifting," Hoar creates a young girl who is at once observing the fate of her family under the weight of economic depression in a sharecropper system and, at the same time, learning how to use womanhood to her own advantage. "I am twelve and becoming a lady," she thinks. "It is easy. A lady doesn't sit with her dress up. She doesn't be loud in public. Inside she can be screaming. In her mind she can be standing on her head, buck-naked. Being a lady is practical. Men tip hats and open doors and give you candy. All they and other ladies want is for you to look shy and act modest and go to church. Being a lady doesn't have to affect your insides."

The beauty of this story is how it captures the girl's world view yet at the same time traces the contours of class and economic pressure. The girl's father is a hardworking sharecropper and her mother a former teacher, dismissed for getting married. But all of her father's labor and all of her mother's gentility can't save the family from disaster. If the story gleans some of its effects from other fiction, the gleanings only enrich the mix.

All the stories in the first—and better—half follow the literary conventions of the tale or the first person fictional retrospective. They also, in various ways, make connections between the greater society and the ground-zero of corporeal, daily life. In the tall tale called "Skin," this is done with wild humor. A small Alabama community's long-time ways are challenged by an incursion of people from unfamiliar ethnic groups. A new immigrant from Vietnam makes common cause with a local black man for a lawn mower race. When it appears they are likely to beat

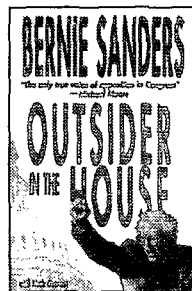
the white folks, a local good old boy takes matters into his own hands and makes sure they don't. As a kind of retribution, the town is punished by an invasion of Colombian luggage thieves.

The stories in the second half have a harsher tone and are somewhat more demanding of the reader. In the two stories that center on Preacher Wevel Snopes, Hoar borrows a lineage from Faulkner and a palette of colors from magical realism. The coolly told but intellectually stimulating "Half Ass" is a fable in which animals don't quite speak English, but do become more and more human by developing human body parts. "Dark Heart" and "The Last Feminine Woman in the World," are in the popular genre of monologue in a violent or criminal mind. The killings in "The Last Feminine Woman in the World" happen as a sort of logical extension to the trajectory of the narrator's voice and story. "I wrote yellow stickum notes to define our relationship in small contracts and posted them in visible places," he says. "My impossible strangeness spoiled it all. The hazardous wastes of my life leaked out no matter how I tried to be tight. Harlotta couldn't stand lies and held up little trapped dead ones under my nose."

Most of these latter stories, highly polished as they are, lack emotional and intellectual resonance. They are a story writer's stories; that is, their passion is in the intelligence and technique of producing the stories. The most moving pieces are those in which Hoar binds together bodies and society with powerful, thin spider webs of fine prose. Nowhere in this collection, however, is there a letdown in entertainment value. The high finish does not hamper the sense of delight in words and literature, and the author appears to be having a wonderful time. If the stories might have been better if they had played longer in the fields of class and race, they are still impressive in scope, beautifully made, and rich with their magical exploration of the gravitational effects of one body on another. ■

Meredith Sue Willis' novel, *Trespassers*, set during the student strikes at Columbia University in 1968, has just been published by Hamilton Stone Editions.

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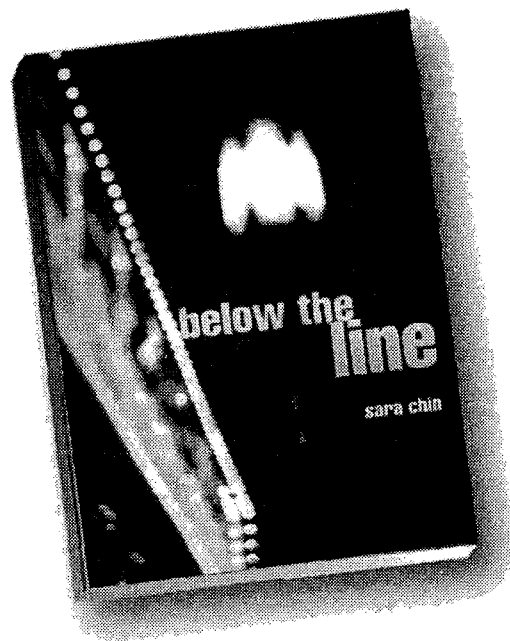
Below the Line

By Sara Chin

City Lights

160 pages, \$9.95

REVIEWED BY KATHY CONE



Like the narrator of her story, "Red Wall," about an American of Chinese descent who travels to Beijing to make an epic documentary about China's 1949 "rebirth" under the Communists, author Sara Chin has unconventional ideas about subject matter and scope.

In the story, Jill, who is the director of the film, wants to recreate history by interviewing old generals about big events. Because of a small budget, she plans to sacrifice background, local color and the texture of details for the "talking heads." The narrator's job is to record interviews of the principals, the "real players," the ones "above the line." Only she finds she'd rather listen to a general's widow, once the "Party Songbird" and now the owner of a curiously luxurious Western bathroom, tell about life with her husband, or hear peasants tell of "drama and tragedy." She wants the details, the gossip, "the low ground, the things that people pushed offstage," the "trashy heart" of history "where the unknown leaped out at you."

In *Below the Line*, all five stories are like the film that the "Red Wall" narrator wants to create—the subject matter is "below the line" in a style that rebels against action, speed, big dramatic moments and gripping revelations. Chin, herself a documentary filmmaker,

prefers the long take, the patient camera, attention to detail, the brief vignette and lots of talk. The narrators of all five stories work in filmmaking, and four of the narrators could be taken for Chin herself.

In "Beltway," the protagonist is the narrator's father. Chin undercuts attempts to get inside his thoughts by using present tense. This device has the effect of holding the father in the lens of a camera. He gets in his car, goes to the old neighborhood, encounters an old acquaintance, gets lost on the way home and is picked up by the police. It is only through the narrator's limited knowledge that we learn about his life. At the end of the story, we see him almost as a film's final fadeout, beautifully and patiently photographed: "My father bends over his plate. He rests an arm on the table and only his wrist moves, dishing up the tofu." Despite this distance, it is a story told with fondness and amusement. A daughter does her best to see the world as her father might.

In "Fever," a story about her mother's life, Chin uses a device reminiscent of Buster Keaton's "The Projectionist," in which the central character is taken up completely by the screen image until his life merges with the fiction. "My mother is a devotee of mayhem, and this story is for her," says the narrator. She spins out a TV action drama in which

her mother is not only a living room spectator but involved in and spoken to by the characters, Tony and Joe, who are a cop and a punk gangster.

The action drama provides an artificial plot for a story made up of reflection and memory as it sums up the mother's uneventful life of drudgery and injustices. Chin attempts to make the idea of violence in the outside world relevant to the mother's life, since it reflects her anger and contrasts with her passivity. The mother "wants things to come out right ... she wants to see the world torn apart, bombed, shot, kicked, burned, beat up, brought to the brink, and then, cleansed of evil and ambiguity, restored to her not as the drudgery of eight-hour shifts, but as a thrilling, infinitely repeating dream."

Chin's experiment here, though interesting to watch, seems overworked and cumbersome. The story works better as a private joke between mother and daughter. The daughter, who makes action-less films, seems to be showing her mother that she can make action-packed stories. And she may be showing her mother that she understands why some people prefer thrills and violence.

Chin writes with compassion and empathy about members of her parents' generation, who came of age in the old China and fled from the Communist

Revolution to America or Taiwan. They know "what it's like to wake up in the middle of the night, not knowing how you have come to this moment in your life." Chin doesn't reveal tension between generations born in different countries and speaking different languages, if she feels any.

These are stories in which little happens but much can be understood. Chin's prose is clean and her images precise and often as economical as poetry. Between the stories are short vignettes, one-page descriptions that are like opening shots in a movie that establish tone or setting: old people practicing Tai Chi at dawn, Chinatown's morning marketplace, the din and clatter of a dim sum restaurant. Within the stories are wonderfully textured scenes, such as this one of old Cantonese ladies returning for Saturday shopping and gossip in Chinatown:

They're genetically programmed to do this, the old ladies. They can't leave the doorway where they get the best gossip, the spot in front of the dim sum palace where they get the best view—who's having the wedding and how big. They can't miss the favorite corner where a cousin has opened a shop, the bakery where an old friend will slip a sweet bun across the counter, the beauty shop where old friends line up against a wall and, sitting in their plastic chairs, pull down the matching plastic dryers that will lock everything in place, every curl, every speck of the dye, every memory.

The title story is the most complicated, and the most memorable. It is one of two stories about the younger generation of American-born Chinese. The narrator-protagonist, May, complains that her life keeps "circling" back to Chinatown despite her intentions.

Her psychiatrist and her brother, a successful young lawyer and business entrepreneur who has "cut a path" from their small, very non-Chinese American town straight to the "lucrative edge" of Chinatown, have instructed her never to shop in Chinatown on an empty stomach or with more than \$20 in her purse. But she is a compulsive buyer, and bank machines are easy to find. Compelled by hunger of one sort or another, she buys far more than she can eat—noodles, dumplings, plums, basil, "green pods of exquisite crunchiness," "perfectly muscled salmon, the perfectly red pepper."

She squanders her energy on such trips. Her doctor tells her that she is using up valuable aggression she needs to get ahead in life. He doesn't think she should be lunging for fish and crabs, fighting off the old Chinese grannies in vests—the ones who never left Chinatown and who "renew their place" every time they go to the market, "to test the rest of us," May says. She presses most of the food on her brother to remind him that he is Chinese.

"Below the Line" is also the most ambitious and fully realized story, with a complex central character engaged in a painful conflict of cultural identity.

Chin develops and plays out—quite openly and self-consciously—a complicated metaphor layered with meaning that delivers the character and the story to a deserved epiphany. May's dependence on "other people's metaphors," other people's language and other people's lives becomes clear to her after she has spent months at a numbing part-time job her brother has arranged videotaping the wills of old Chinese men:

My mother tongue, my father tongue. There was so little I remembered of the language I knew in deepest childhood. What metaphors made me throw my tongue away? I could almost taste the blood still. Was it chink, was it jap? After my early battles here with other people's metaphors I would not speak the sounds closest to me. I went out instead and reeled in miles of other people's utterances, I spun their lives around my tape machine, I listened to their stories, and always, I kept a vigilant ear to what lurked beneath the surface, below the line.

Chin shows her full range of talent in this darkly comic story full of sharp images and deep feeling. It leaves a lingering, bittersweet aftertaste that makes the whole of the book memorable. ■

Kathy Cone is editor of *The Workbook*, an environmental and social change quarterly published in Albuquerque, N.M.

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Museums Making History

Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian

By Richard Kurin

Smithsonian Institution Press

320 pages, \$17.95

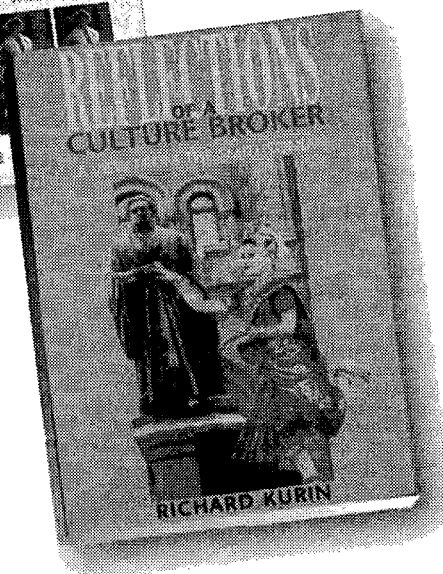
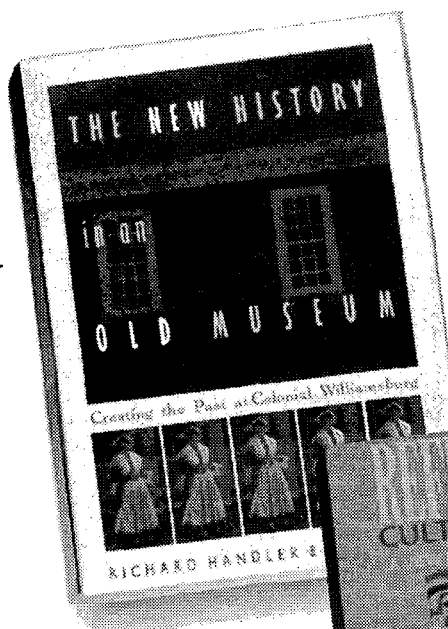
The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg

By Richard Handler and Eric Gable

Duke University Press

260 pages, \$16.95

REVIEWED BY CHRIS RASMUSSEN



According to Richard Kurin, museum curators, historians, anthropologists and other scholars are “culture brokers,” indispensable middlemen who translate the histories and cultures of far-flung times and places for a mass audience. In *Reflections of a Culture Broker*, Kurin surveys his 20 years as a curator and director of the Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, during which he helped to organize exhibitions on everything from the culture of India to the display of Southern music and crafts that accompanied the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. As he reflects on his career and notable recent controversies over the role of museums in American life, Kurin champions the role of culture brokers in connecting the worlds of the academy and the public.

Kurin, a cultural anthropologist by training, laments that culture brokers lack greater influence over the depiction of history, and are getting “outgunned and eclipsed by politicians, journalists,

filmmakers, television producers, theme park operators, public relations firms, tour operators, corporate marketeers, novelists and Webmeisters.” Access to money and mass media, rather than scholarly credentials, too often determines whose version of the past prevails, and “understandings from scholarly disciplines have to a great degree failed to penetrate popular ones.” More people learn about history from Hollywood than from the Smithsonian or university professors.

While Kurin’s broader pleas on behalf of facilitating dialogue about history and culture are appealing, his accounts of particular episodes of cultural brokering reveal his impatience with the culture brokers with whom he disagrees. For instance, Kurin criticizes the Smithsonian’s plans to exhibit the *Enola Gay*, the airplane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

As originally conceived, the *Enola Gay* exhibit would have encouraged the museum’s visitors to consider virtually

every aspect of the bombing—whether it was necessary, the misgivings of some scientists and military men, its catastrophic death toll, the onset of the nuclear arms race and the origins of the Cold War. Veterans groups, defense contractors, conservative columnists and politicians objected to the Smithsonian’s plans, claiming that the exhibit would be unduly critical of American war aims and would fail to commemorate adequately the American victory in the Pacific.

Enlisted men, as Kurin notes, were understandably relieved, if not downright delighted, when the atomic bomb brought the war in the Pacific to an end without a bloody invasion of the Japanese mainland, and so were overwhelmingly in favor of President Harry Truman’s decision to use the weapon. Soldiers and sailors were not personally responsible for the destruction wrought by the bomb, the thousands of Japanese who subsequently succumbed to radiation sickness, or the strategic, political

and moral repercussions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ultimately, the exhibit's opponents prevented the museum from tackling any of the controversial issues surrounding the Hiroshima bombing.

Kurin, who was not involved in planning the exhibit of the *Enola Gay*, indicts several of his Smithsonian colleagues, especially former National Air and Space Museum director Martin Harwit, for unwillingness to incorporate veterans' memories of the war's end into plans for the exhibit. Smithsonian officials, he claims, "naively believed that there is an absolute historical truth" and dismissed opponents of the planned exhibit as being motivated by political disagreements with their examination of the bombing, rather than by a legitimate difference over the interpretation of the war's end.

But the alliance of critics that shot down the Smithsonian's plans to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the war's end were not interested in dialogue, but rather, were determined to foreclose any discussion of the moral and political implications of dropping the bomb. From their perspective, using atomic weapons to hasten the war's end was indisputably right, and encouraging the Smithsonian's visitors to re-examine President Truman's decision to do so was unpatriotic and dangerous. While one of the strengths of Kurin's book is his willingness to criti-

cize culture brokers, blaming the brokers for the *Enola Gay* controversy seems misplaced.

The firestorm over the *Enola Gay* was but one battle in what journalists have dubbed the "culture wars," a series of arguments over how American history ought to be presented to students and the public. In the aftershock of the *Enola Gay* controversy, the Smithsonian launched a two-year traveling exhibit, "America's Smithsonian," in order to afford Americans who might be unable to visit Washington an opportunity to view some of the museum's most famous holdings—Lincoln's top hat, Edison's light bulb, Dorothy's ruby slippers. Some reviewers complained about the exhibition's lack of historical analysis or even a coherent theme, and charged that the Smithsonian's curators, cowed by the furor over the *Enola Gay*, had deliberately mounted a dazzling, but innocuous, exhibit of icons that shirked the meaningful issues in American history.

Kurin, who helped to curate the exhibit, dismisses these criticisms. The Smithsonian's "culture brokers," he contends, deliberately devised an exhibition that "spoke over the heads of curators and the usual cadre of museum critics to the people. Consequently, most of the usual criteria for assessing exhibit content did not apply"—a point of view that effectively precludes cultural debate of any sort. Here, as in his discussion of the *Enola Gay* exhibit, Kurin seems more interested in advancing his own views or settling old scores than in fostering dialogue about American history and culture.

Anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable, like Kurin, recognize that culture brokers wield tremendous influence in shaping our understanding of the past but that they are also constrained by the perspectives of their sponsors, employers and audience. In *The New History in an Old Museum*, Handler and Gable examine the presentation of early American history at Colonial Williamsburg, the privately endowed, impeccably maintained Virginia historic site staffed by personnel who recreate daily life in early America by demonstrating traditional crafts—

spinning thread, making candles, shoeing horses—in an ostensibly "authentic" setting. They conclude that the historic site's presentation of the past has changed surprisingly little in recent decades, despite the tremendous growth and influence of social history, African-American history and women's history in universities and even among Williamsburg's staff. As a result, Williamsburg still conveys the impression that American society is culturally homogenous and discounts the deep-seated divisions of race, class and gender that have riven its history from the colonial era to the present. Rather than transporting visitors to an unfamiliar, sometimes troubling past, Williamsburg provides an endorsement for our contemporary liberal, capitalist, consumer-oriented society.

Handler and Gable elude the trap that snares most scholars of American culture by refusing to view Williamsburg's version of the American past either as dictated by some nefarious conspiracy that controls the historic site, or by the consumers who pay to visit it. Colonial Williamsburg's retelling of history is neither imposed from the top, determined by popular demand or brokered by middlemen. It results instead from an extraordinarily complicated process that can only be described as hegemony, in which corporate donors, administrators, historians, tour guides and the public all contribute to rendering the conflict-ridden history of colonial Virginia bland. The anthropologists' sophisticated account of how a cacophony of voices adds up to little more than white noise seems more apt than Kurin's contention that culture brokers mediate the dialogue between sponsors, scholars and the public.

Handler and Gable conducted extensive field research at Williamsburg. They describe the day-to-day operation of the site in detail that only curators will care to know, but they make the nebulous concept of hegemony concrete, which is a remarkable achievement.

Focusing on the historians and interpreters who translate history for the million people who visit Colonial Williamsburg each year, Handler and Gable conclude that the history taught at Williamsburg is narrowly confined to

Williamsburg still conveys the impression that America is culturally homogenous, discounting divisions of race, class and gender that have riven its history.

specific facts rather than broader themes. "Frontline" employees, the tour guides who lead visitors around the site, are advised to restrict their discussion of colonial and revolutionary America to people and events that can be directly linked to Williamsburg's past. A visitor who inquires about slave owners having sex with or raping slave women will typically be informed that rumors that local slave owner George Wythe fathered children with his slave, Lydia Broadnax, "are not documented." Thus, the widespread incidence of liaisons, consensual or coerced, between masters and slaves—much less the larger issues of racism and patriarchy—is dismissed for lack of specific evidence about the behavior of one slave owner. This fixation on facts, or "authenticity," shapes every aspect of the past at Colonial Williamsburg. Like those Civil War buffs who argue fiercely over what Robert E. Lee ate for breakfast before the disastrous third day at Gettysburg but neglect the more important issue of the war's underlying cause of slavery, Williamsburg's historians and curators seem more interested in re-creating his-

torically authentic door locks than in unlocking the fundamental divisions of race, class, and gender that permeated society in colonial Virginia.

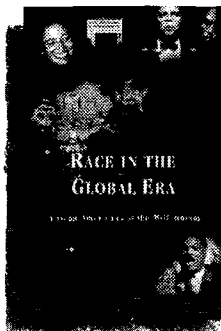
In addition to its undue emphasis on specific facts, Williamsburg suffers from a determination to ensure that visitors feel only "good vibes" during their encounter with American history. Visitors, after all, are paying customers, and the customer, not the historian, is always right. Handler and Gable tweak Williamsburg as "a Republican Disneyland," a historical theme park that entertains its visitors, rather than educates them. Thus, tour guides are encouraged to avoid discussions about controversial aspects of the past, so that visitors can enjoy America's heritage and take pride in its progress. As an antidote to this anodyne approach to American history, Handler and Gable urge the creation of exhibits and tours designed to unsettle viewers and force them to recognize that history is frequently an unhappy subject.

While both books discuss the people who "consume" culture by visiting museums and historic sites, neither book gives sufficient credit to these

consumers. Kurin believes that new understandings of history and culture emanate from the scholarly disciplines, and require brokers to make them intelligible to the public. Similarly, Handler and Gable assume that Williamsburg's "customers" are poorly educated about history, and come to admire the employees' period costumes and snap photographs of the site's lovely 18th-century buildings, but not to encounter serious debates about the past. But many Americans want more than pabulum from museums and historic sites, and can handle historical controversies better than some politicians, pundits and scholars have assumed. The challenge—and it is daunting—for historians, curators and other culture brokers, is to craft interpretations of history that allow for disagreements, rather than foreclose them, so that we can escape the storms of contention that have too often swirled around the Smithsonian and the fog of consensus that continues to shroud Williamsburg. ■

Chris Rasmussen teaches American history at the University of Georgia.

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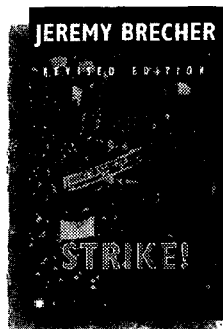
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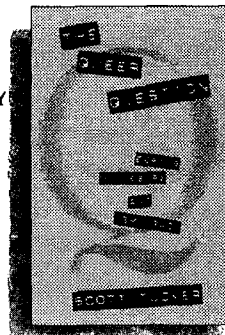
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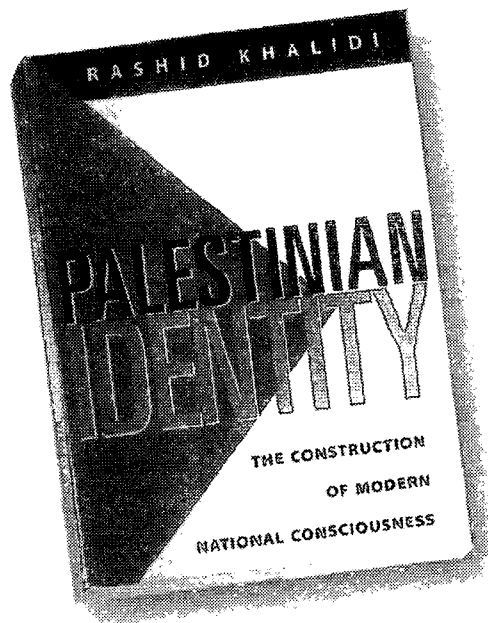
Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness

By Rashid Khalidi

Columbia University Press

309 pages, \$29.50

REVIEWED BY RALPH SELIGER



As a scholar of Middle Eastern history at the University of Chicago and an American of distinguished Palestinian lineage who has advised PLO diplomats and officials, Rashid Khalidi combines a commitment to Palestinian interests with formidable analytic skills. In *Palestinian Identity*, he contributes to the overheated field of Palestinian-Israeli historiography by applying a refreshing perspective. "National identity is constructed; it is not an essential, transcendent given, as the apostles of nationalism ... claim," he writes. It arises from people's perception of shared experience and fate, i.e., a "national narrative."

Khalidi outlines how the Palestinians have shifted in self-definition and sentiment depending on the era in which they lived. They were Arabs of Ottoman loyalty in the waning years of the Turkish Empire, and some developed a "South Syrian" identification for a few years following World War I. They have manifested competing pan-Arab, pan-Islamic, Jordanian and Palestinian nationalist orientations in more recent decades.

By reporting upon views presented in the Ottoman parliament of the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Palestinian-Arab representatives and in a content analysis of regional newspapers into the '20s, Khalidi traces the early evolution of Palestinian consciousness. A number

of his ancestors figure in this story.

Khalidi relates how the very concept of a Palestinian people had virtually disappeared from international discourse between the "Nakba," the catastrophic defeat and dispersion of 1947-48, and the rise to prominence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) following the Six-Day War of June 1967. Although the PLO succeeded in refocusing world attention on their plight, Khalidi criticizes its clumsy maneuvering from defeat to defeat. Its "quixotic" celebration of "failure as triumph" disguised its defeat in every military effort: the Battle of al-Karama in 1968, the war with King Hussein in 1970, and the years in southern Lebanon that ended with the 1982 Israeli invasion and exile in Tunisia.

By focusing only on development of Palestinian consciousness, Khalidi misses an opportunity to make a broader statement on the rights of all peoples to define themselves. Just as Jews have tended to cast "the Arabs" as an undifferentiated hostile mass, "the Zionists" are depicted here in mostly one-dimensional terms as an alien "other" and a sinister juggernaut that could not be reasoned with. The truth is far more complex.

The "Second Aliya" (the wave of Zionist immigration of the early years of the 20th century) began to transform the country through land purchases

from mostly absentee and other Arab owners, Khalidi notes. With the assent and occasional assistance of Ottoman authorities, the tenant farmers were evicted. The plantations of the earlier (pre-Zionist) settlers, in being worked by hired Arab hands, resembled colonialist enterprises elsewhere in the Third World. But the Second Aliya constituted something different. Khalidi does not emphasize that these "colonialists" related to no mother country, exploited few native laborers and did not seize property but legally purchased it.

Still, these early transactions between Jews and Arabs produced a poisonous fallout that formed a tragic model for future relations. Khalidi indicates that displaced tenant farmers violently resisted the new owners. The settlers created a Zionist militia called Hashomer (literally, "the Guard"), a forerunner to the famous underground army Haganah, to counter these attacks.

Despite the symbolic victory of securing Britain's Balfour Declaration in 1917, which proclaimed that Palestine should become a Jewish "national home," the Zionists did not long remain "protégés" of the British as Khalidi contends. The Arab Rebellion of 1936-39 was a military disaster for the Palestinians, as Khalidi tells it, but it was also a political success. It influenced the British to issue the "White Paper" of

This so enraged the Stern gang, the ultra-nationalist underground led by Yitzhak Shamir, that it launched armed attacks on the British even when they constituted Palestine's sole shield against Rommel's advancing Afrika Corps. The Stern gang's rival on the underground Zionist right, the Irgun led by Menachem Begin, joined the attack after World War II.

The victory of the Zionist “juggernaut” in the 1947-48 war was less certain and more closely fought than Khalidi would have us believe. It cost the Jewish community 1 percent of its total population of 600,000, plus 15,000 wounded. It also witnessed Israel’s defeat in every major engagement with Transjordan’s Arab Legion, leaving the Old City of Jerusalem and the Etzion Bloc entirely in Arab hands.

war might have ended differently. Would victory by the Palestinians' most powerful leader, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the pro-Nazi Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, have meant a more humane result? Khalidi does not examine the significance of a community subject to such a leadership.

Likewise, there is no discussion of the Zionist left: Hashomer Hatzair advocated binationalism and opposed the concept of a Jewish state. The group that became Achdut Ha'Avoda advocated a federated state with Palestinian Arabs. Both were militantly socialist and pro-Soviet, and critical to varying degrees of the Zionist "Conquest of Labor" campaign castigated by Khalidi.

the very beginning by the need to flee anti-Semitism—virulently expressed early this century in pogroms of the Czarist regime and the ensuing Russian civil war, and later with the rise of Hitler. But Khalidi does not pronounce what the Zionist left and peace camps have long articulated: that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a clash between two peoples defending the identical right to live with security and dignity.

Khalidi's critique of the Oslo process in *In These Times* ("A Flawed Peace," June 30) makes no reference to the Beilin-Abbas talks and how close Oslo came to success. In both the article and the book, he fails to emphasize—even now when it's so burningly obvious—that not all Zionists are alike. ■

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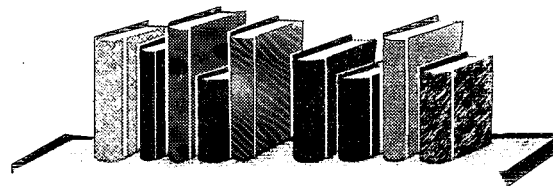
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IN THESE TIMES **42** NOVEMBER 23, 1997



**Lonely Hunters: An oral history
of lesbian and gay Southern life,
1948-1968**

By James T. Sears
Westview Press
303 pages, \$24

REVIEWED BY PAT ARNOW

When acting Governor Charley E. Johns formed a legislative investigation committee to rid "perverts" from Florida in 1954, newspapers and law enforcement joined the crusade. In this fearsome atmosphere, gay men and lesbians took their chances with harassment or arrest at gay bars and at the 22nd Street Beach. "This was a time of great danger, but also grand excitement," remembers a gay man.

Lonely Hunters tells this history and follows the stories of some of the people damaged by the crusade. For instance, Arlen C. Davies, a popular humanities professor at the University of Florida-Gainesville, was one of 16 gay faculty members who lost their jobs as a consequence of the Johns' rout. Davies spent the next five years unemployed and unemployable.

Lonely Hunters profiles other Southern stories as well, including the unusual Charleston, S.C., case of Gordon Langley Hall, a well-to-do transsexual, who became Dawn Hall and married a black man. He lost all his property because he flouted Southern propriety.

The book also tells the story of the gay men—black and white—who led the Chapel Hill, N.C., civil rights movement, and details the beginnings of political and social gay activism in Washington, D.C.

All the sections combine personal stories and histories culled from newspapers and public documents. But the Florida section stands out, putting together all the pieces in a beautifully constructed personal, political and

social history. It succeeds in evoking a place and time, and shows the effects of headline news on people never mentioned in a newspaper.

**The Kennedy Obsession:
The American Myth of JFK**
By John Hellmann
Columbia University Press
206 pages, \$29.50

REVIEWED JEFFERSON DECKER

Biographers spend much time rooting through stories about their subject, trying to sort the legitimate from the apocryphal, the truth from the mythology. In *The Kennedy Obsession*, John Hellmann seeks out precisely the John F. Kennedy that a reliable biographer might ignore. The result is a sketch of the cultural meanings of JFK.

Hellmann writes that the romantic fiction Kennedy devoured as a child (Sir Walter Scott, Arthurian legends) shaped his world view. Kennedy then used the media to cultivate mini-celebrity status before he entered politics—publishing, for example, an idealistic book about English policy toward Hitler with his father's friend Henry Luce.

But as the book veers into Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign and subsequent administration, which the media dubbed Camelot, Hellmann's analysis becomes strained. He argues that Kennedy drew on Hollywood films like *Shane* and *The Searchers* to build movie-star appeal. But he fails to distinguish between the images that Kennedy consciously or unconsciously adopted, and those which he did not adopt but the public nevertheless saw.

Thirty-four years after his death, forged letters proposing a Kennedy-Monroe-Mafia connection still make the front page of the newspaper. Does that happen because JFK faced the Cuban Missile Crisis with "the exper-

tise, the emotion, and the direct experience" of the "hero of American cinema" or because contemporary Americans are still happy to be romanced by the myth of Camelot?

**No sweat: fashion, free trade, and the
rights of workers**
Edited by Andrew Ross
Verso Press
313 pages, \$19

REVIEWED BY DEIDRE McFADYEN

The decline of government regulation and diminishing union strength paved the way for the re-emergence of domestic sweatshops, which had been virtually stamped out earlier in this century. Third World sweatshops have also multiplied as corporations chase cheaper and cheaper labor. "It will take massive organizing, mandated retailer and manufacturer responsibility, and public support to bring this monster to its knees," Steve Nutter concludes in his article in *no sweat*, a stimulating collection of essays on garment-industry labor.

Thanks to the feisty National Labor Committee (NLC), retailers like Eddie Bauer and the Gap have been shamed into answering for the working conditions of the sewing machine operators at the bottom end of the production chain. "Our job is to make the system translucent," NLC head Charles Kernaghan says in one article. "There's something profoundly political about doing that."

No sweat grew out of a conference organized by the New York University American Studies Program, the garment workers' union UNITE and *The Nation*. The collection includes the testimony of garment workers, essays on the economics and history of sweatshop labor, and articles on various opposition tactics. It should be mandatory reading before that next trip to the shopping mall. ■

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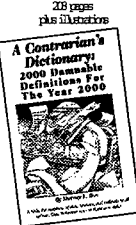
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Schuster, which last December released *Jingle All the Way*, the book based on the Arnold Schwarzenegger Christmas movie.

This ownership structure has fostered a drive for bestsellers, often to the exclusion of quality, says Underdown, who maintains an in-depth children's publishing Web site, *A Purple Crayon* (www.underdown.org). "Publishers are seeking double-digit profits, a level hard to attain in our business without a lot of luck and a relentless focus on the market," he says.

New markets, licensing and the publication of books about popular characters have fueled growth in the children's book industry over the last decade. According to the Association of American Publishers, sales of children's books totaled \$1.5 billion in 1996 alone. Sales of hardcover books were up 10 percent over 1995; paperbacks were up 20 percent.

Dozens of children's imprints, however, have folded in the wake of shakeups and mergers. The 1993 merger between mass-market publisher Simon & Schuster and Macmillan—which in 1919 was the first trade publisher to create a children's division—killed 10 children's imprints, including such respected names in children's publishing as Scribner and Collier. Last year, Simon & Schuster got rid of yet another Macmillan imprint, Macmillan Books For Young Readers, although they created a new one this year, a media tie-in called Simon Spotlight.

The books these conglomerates produce are watered-down narratives that erase all the hopes, desires and yes, even fears that good children's literature expresses so well. "Tigger," we are reassured in the Disney version of *Winnie the Pooh*, "is not very scary," and "Christopher Robin is a good friend to all the animals and always lends them a helping hand."

In a spate of tie-in books from the movie *Hercules*, deliberate anachronisms turn a legendary tale into pure Hollywood pandering. "I'm an action hero!" boasts Hercules after saving the city of Thebes. Later, Hades scolds his henchmen for "slurping on a cup of Herculade sports drink" and "wearing Hercules sandals." Shrieks Hades: "You're wearing his merchandise!" Proper names, for the most part, are the series' only nod to the original myths.

It's easy to become indignant about this schlock and steeped in nostalgia for the books one read as a child. I realize that I may be romanticizing the past. As a child, I devoured Nancy Drew mysteries, many of which I now know were written by a syndicate of writers on the basis of outlines provided by author Carolyn Keene. Reading this admittedly less-than-great literature didn't harm me.

Alarmed by rising illiteracy rates and the power of television, teachers and librarians are reluctant to make blanket criticisms of mass-market children's publishing. The larger crusade, points out Barbara Swanson, a curriculum consultant in Portland, Ore., is to get children to read. "I would never suggest that schools teach [these books]," she says. "But they are useful for the kid who just isn't interested in reading. That format might get the story into the children's heads and make them more likely to pick up something better later on."

These books might provide children their only ready access to reading material. The growth of commercialized children's

literature is part of a chain of events set in motion by government cutbacks and funding crises in libraries and schools. "When money was eliminated for library programs, especially in schools, you started to see a lot more gimmick books that appeal to stores rather than libraries," says Elizabeth Watson, president of the Association for Library Services to Children. "You just can't circulate a book with a plush animal attached."

According to *Emergency Librarian*, discount stores such as Kmart and Wal-Mart have replaced schools and libraries as the biggest purchasers of children's books. "It's a retailer-driven business," Michael Harkavy, Warner Brothers' vice president for worldwide publishing, told *Publishers Weekly* in April.

"*Stellaluna* and the *Babysitter's Club* are treated by a corporation in the same way as Cheerios and Coca-Cola are," warns Underdown. "Media tie-ins, alternative book products ... and mass-market series such as *Goosebumps* [R.L. Stine's Taco Bell- and Pepsi-promoted horror series] are the result."

I saw evidence of the next commercial step recently here in Portland: *The M&M's Brand Chocolate Candies Counting Book*. On its back cover, it carried this disclaimer: "The exact number of pieces of each color of M&M's varies from package to package. As a result, there may be insufficient quantities of each color to match the quantity of colors required for play in this book." According to *Publishers Weekly*, this book sold 187,778 copies in 1996.

Pathetic, as the original Eeyore would say. Just pathetic. ■

Linda Baker is a freelance writer in Portland, Ore.

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David Terry

I was paging through *Winnie the Pooh* at Books R Us, the book department of Toys R Us, when I realized that what I held was nothing A.A. Milne would have written or E.H. Shephard would have illustrated. "Friends are for sharing and caring and such. Thank you for sharing, Pooh. Thank you so much!" read the caption underneath a cartoon illustration of Pooh and Piglet eating a watermelon.

First of all, everyone knows Pooh never eats anything but hunny. Secondly, A.A. Milne, with his trademark British wit, would never have allowed the inhabitants of the Hundred Acre Wood to mouth such drivel. Compare a line from the original: "Then would you read a Sustaining Book," asks Pooh, temporarily stuck in Rabbit's hole. "such as would Help and Comfort a Wedged Bear in Great Tightness?"

What I held was the Disney version of Pooh, which went along with the Disney versions of *The Jungle Book*, *The Lion King* and *Pocahontas*. There was a new issue of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, not the original by Margery Williams, but a special cartoon Easter version from Simon & Schuster. Also prominently displayed were *Star Wars: A New Hope*, property of Lucasfilms Ltd., dozens of Barney books and a series of toddler titles featuring the Muppet Babies.

These books, I discovered, are far more popular than classic children's literature. Topping *Publishers Weekly's* 1996 list

of children's bestsellers were Disney's versions of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which sold 603,600 copies, *101 Dalmatians* (455,555) and Pooh's *The Sweetest Christmas* (441,200). To earn a place on the list of 200 titles, books had to sell a minimum of 75,000 copies. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* books didn't make the cut. However, at least five other Disney Pooh books did, including one entitled *Eeyore, Be Happy*. Only one of the American Library Association's notable books of 1996 made the list.

Movie and entertainment conglomerates have become the giants in children's publishing, creating products that editorial consultant Harold Underdown calls "semi-books."

"These books are pre-sold to children who've bought the doll, seen the movie or watched the video," says Sandra Wilde, an associate professor of curriculum and instruction at Portland State University. "Since they're based on a corporate model and not an author's vision, there's no effort to develop unique plots, themes or characters."

According to a study published by *Emergency Librarian*, 84 percent of books in the *Children's Catalog Supplement* were published by companies that not only had major interests in multimedia and entertainment but that also "subordinated the position of children's publishing within their hierarchical structures." For example, Disney owns Hyperion, the children's arm of Little, Brown. And Viacom owns Simon &

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